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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine
Issue #12
Spring 1991

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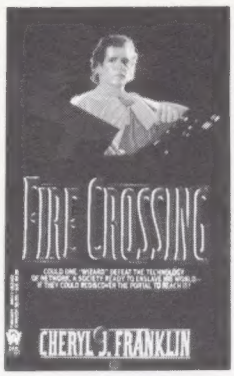

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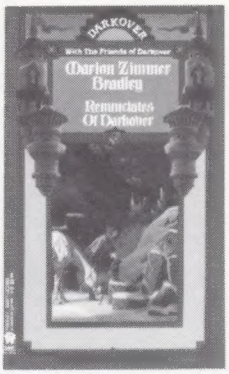

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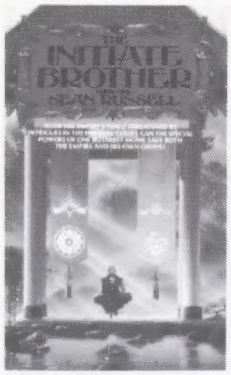

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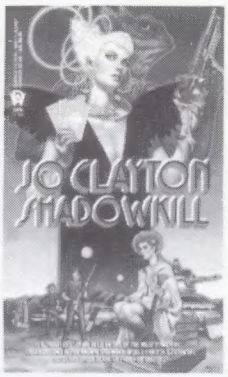

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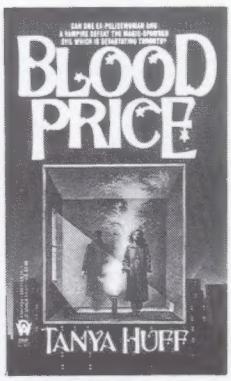

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Butterfly St. Cyr had a well-deserved reputation as an honest and dependable smuggler. But when she and her partner, a highly illegal artificial intelligence, rescued Tiggy, the son and heir to one of the most powerful of the hellflower mercenary leaders, it looked like they'd finally taken more than they could handle. For his father's enemies had sworn to see that Tiggy and Butterfly never reached his home alive....

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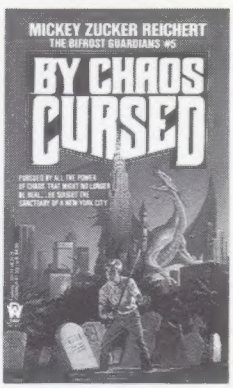

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Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers at a special rate of $3.50 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include your name and address.

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FANTASY

Magazine

EDITORIAL

This has certainly been an interesting few months, and it has really given me a new appreciation for the work Jan Burke, our former Managing Editor, was doing for us. When she resigned in January we moved all of the magazine's operations into my personal office (the zoning hearing is scheduled for next week, after which we hope that the city will finally issue our business license), where the magazine's workload promptly absorbed my entire existing staff plus the two new employees we hired. And then, just as we finished the change of address forms for the Oakland/Piedmont to Berkeley move, the post office decided to change our Berkeley box number. ALL mail to the magazine should now go to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701. If you have any other addresses for us in your records, please erase them.

Since we have a terrific new Managing Editor, Rachel Holmen, my own workload hasn't changed much. I still read each manuscript that comes in (unless it uses dot-matrix printing which I physically cannot read) and decide whether to keep or return it. The volume of manuscripts has increased considerably over the last three years (thank goodness), so it takes more of my time, but I am still firmly committed to reading everything in the slush pile. In addition to my efforts, I have a full-time employee who spends nearly all his working hours handling the clerical side of this process: getting the mail from the post office, logging in the manuscripts, typing the rejection letters, standing over me while I sign them, making the file copies of the letters, logging out the manuscripts, putting them back in the SASEs, and taking them back to the post office. And the more manuscripts we get, the more difficult it becomes to maintain our goal of getting one day turnaround on 80-90% of submissions. But we're still in there trying — after my decades as a writer I firmly believe that writers are entitled to the quickest possible decision from editors. I try very hard to be the kind of editor I wanted to work with when I was a young writer.

The major change in my work is that I have started attending conventions again. I was at Norwescon in March and Baycon in May, and during the rest of this year I plan to attend Westercon, Mythcon, Vikingcon, and the Darkover Grand Council Meeting. I must say that I was rather startled by how surprised people were to see me at conventions. Let me say for the record that the reports of my total incapacity and/or imminent death are greatly exaggerated. Yes, I have had eye surgery, three strokes, and a heart attack over the last five or six years, but the last time I was in the hospital was a year ago. And I'm a pretty tough old bird; I tend to recover quite well once I put my mind to it. I walk more slowly now, and I have trouble recognizing faces (so if you encounter me at a convention please tell me who you are), but I am NOT at death's door, and I have no immediate plans to visit that neighborhood.

This magazine is something I have wanted to do for decades, and now that I have it, I am not giving it up without a real fight. Discovering and encouraging new writers is one of the most satisfying things in my life. And I am also grateful for the established pros, such as my friend Madeleine L'Engle, who took time from her very busy schedule to provide the cover story for this issue, and more others than I can name, who support me in this effort.

And, of course, I have to thank all of my subscribers and other readers, without whom this magazine wouldn't have a chance, both for their subscriptions and for their encouraging notes and letters. The love and support I get from all of you will be one of the happiest experiences of my life — even if I live to be 97 like my grandfather.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

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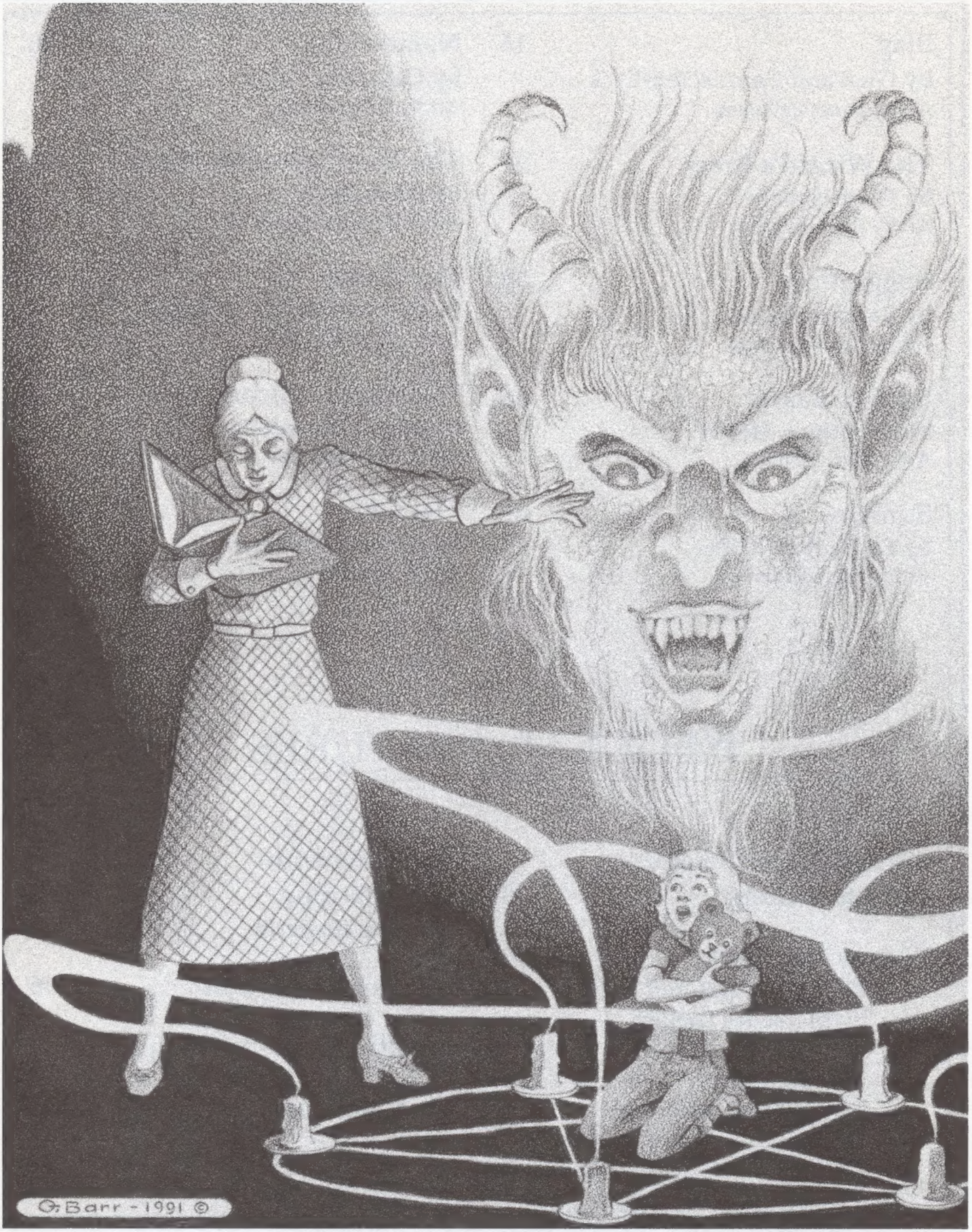

G. Barr - 1991 ©

The Connecticut Eskimo

by Madeleine L'Engle

Old Mrs. Campbell leaned over the counter towards me, first looking towards the back of the store to make sure we were alone, then to the door to see that no one was coming up the steps. "How she would love to be an Eskimo just for one night!" she said softly.

"An Eskimo? Who?" I asked stupidly, for Mrs. Campbell had been on one of her long monologues and I had been only half listening.

"Alicia. My daughter-in-law."

"But why an Eskimo?" I asked.

"Eskimos put old people like me out on an ice floe to freeze to death. Of course it wouldn't bother me too much if she did try something like that. I have my connections and I'd get off." But she sounded very agitated.

Old Mrs. Campbell talked at length to me when she came into the store, and on almost any subject, but she had never before made me wonder whether her mind might be affected. I said, soothingly, "Anyhow, there aren't any ice floes around here."

Mrs. Campbell looked down at the little girl who was clinging to her. "You help Granny now, Sylvie," she said. "We'll start, of course, with the Campbell soup. Wouldn't do to slight a family connection, no matter how distant. Bring Granny a tomato soup like a good girl."

When Sylvie had gone after the tomato soup, Mrs. Campbell leaned closer to me. "You may wonder why I'm talking like this, Mrs. Franklin, but I have my reasons. Do you know how cold it was last night?"

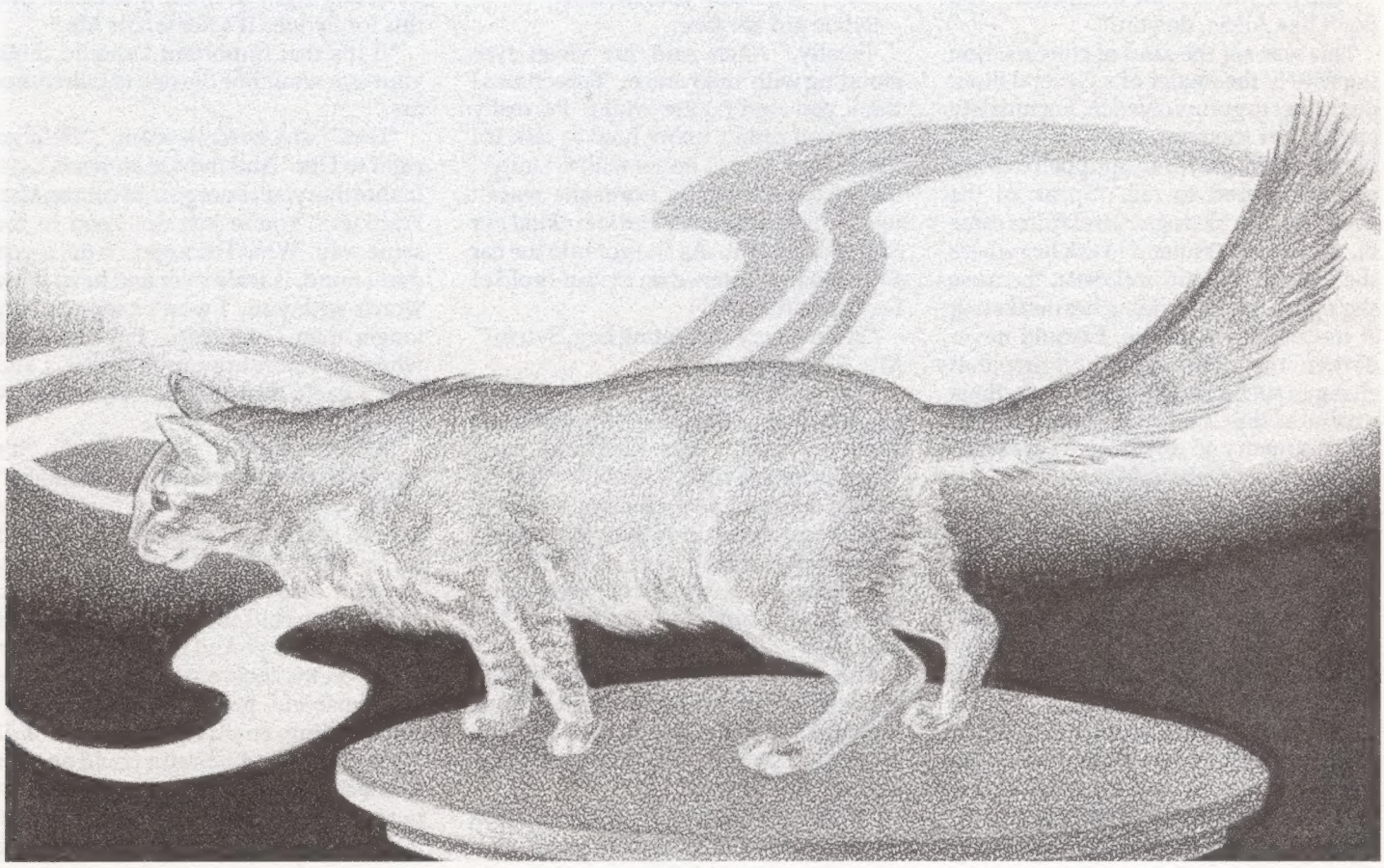
It had been the coldest night of the autumn so far, that first shocking plummeting of the mercury, when the grass crunches beneath your feet and the stars seem made of ice. "Well, the thermometer on our north wall said fifteen degrees this morning," I said.

Mrs. Campbell nodded. "Mrs. Franklin, last night at bed time when I was heating water for my camomile tea I went to let in Nyx," she looked out the door to where her great cat brooded, waiting for her on the store porch, "and she took her good time coming in, mincing across that frozen lawn as though it were mid-summer. And when I turned to go back into the house, the door had been shut behind me. Shut and locked. And it was my daughter-in-law who did it."

"Oh, nonsense, Mrs. Campbell!" I exclaimed in a shocked voice.

"Nonsense my Aunt Osiris," Mrs. Campbell retorted. "We may not have any ice floes, but if I had been left on the door step all night, I would have died of the cold or had pneumonia at the very least."

"But you *weren't* left on the doorstep," I said comfortingly.



"Oh, yes, I was. That door was shut and locked. On purpose. But I got in. Oh, yes, I got in. I know a few little tricks, I do. And when she saw me, she looked as though I were a ghost. She didn't expect me back in that house alive. 'Why, Granny, I thought you'd gone up to bed,' she said, 'and I locked the door. How did you get in?' Not much point in telling her, was there? I was in and *that* was the point. And my fool of a son sat in front of the television grinning at some program without the least idea of what was going on in his own house. Of course, I've always told him he underestimates her."

"But Mrs. Campbell," I tried again. "You can't mean what you're saying! Surely Alicia wouldn't do anything like that. You said yourself she said she thought you were upstairs. And anyhow, you know how good she is, always thinking about other people." For Alicia Campbell has the unusual reputation of being as saintly as she looks.

Old Mrs. Campbell shook her head. "Yes, that's what bothered me. First time I've ever known Alicia to do anything human." She leaned closer to me across the counter. "Mrs. Franklin, you believe me, don't you?"

"No, of course I don't," I said.

"Oh, yes, you do," she whispered. "You don't like Alicia, do you?"

This was *not* the kind of conversation the wife of the owner of a General Store ought *ever* to get involved in. Fortunately just at that moment, the bells over the door jangled, old Mrs. Campbell cackled and whispered to me, "Speak of the devil," and cackled again, and Alicia came in. "And I don't intend to ask her where she's been," she said, *sotto voce*, "because she's probably been doing her marketing at the A&P. As for me, I would never darken the doors of a concern that changed such a beautiful and melodious a name as the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company to anything as plebeian and unpoetic as the A&P."

"Oh, there you are, Mother C.," Alicia said in her crisp, no-nonsense-now voice. "You and Sylvie can ride home with me. It's really much too cold for you to walk."

"Thank you, no, Alicia," old Mrs. Campbell said, equally crisply. "Nyx does not like cars, and Sylvie and I prefer to walk. We like the exercise."

"It's too long a walk for Sylvie," Alicia Campbell said, rather irritably, but she was not going to cross her mother-in-law in public. She turned to me, angelically beautiful and devilishly efficient. "Madeleine, my scout troop is having a bakery sale next Saturday to raise money for an outing. Is it all right if we use the store? Of course, if it's warm we'll use the porch; otherwise, we'll have to bring the things inside."

On Saturdays the store is apt to be crowded. I looked out at Alicia's car and saw the back seats loaded with groceries from the A&P which she could have bought right here. But the scouts are not responsible for the fact that I don't care for Alicia Campbell, so I just said, "You'll have to check with Hugh, but I imagine it will be all right."

"Fine. Don't you and Hugh forget to come to the PTA this week. I have a very good speaker lined up." Alicia is vice-president of PTA. She's a trustee of our church and she teaches Sunday School and she's a Den Mother, and no matter how much she take on she seems capable of even more, and she always looks beautiful and she never seems tired.

"You're sure you don't want to ride home with me?" she asked old Mrs. Campbell.

"Thank you, no, Alicia."

"Sylvie, you come along with me."

But Sylvie just clung to her grandmother's skirts.

"Say, 'No, thank you, mother.'"

Sylvie hid her face.

"Really," Alicia said, her violet eyes clouding with annoyance. "Sometimes I think you aren't quite bright. I'd really think you didn't know how to talk if I didn't hear you at home with Granny." She swept out of the store; she wasn't used to being crossed, and it rankled her that I had seen it. As she got into the car the sunlight glistened on the pale gold of her beautiful hair.

"Where's my marketing bag, Sylvie?" Mrs. Campbell asked.

The marketing bag was in Mrs. Campbell's hand and Sylvie pointed to it silently. "Ah!" Mrs. Campbell said. "Come along, Sylvie." And they trotted out the door and down the steps. Slowly Nyx, the cat, stood up on the rail, stretched lasciviously, arched its back, fluffed out its tail, drew its claws destructively along the rail, and trotted daintily down the highway.

That night I'd just finished putting the children to bed and was setting the table for breakfast when the phone rang. My husband called to me from the living room. "It's for you."

"Who is it?" I asked, coming in, carrying the children's three milk mugs.

"She wouldn't say."

I put the mugs down on the desk by the telephone, annoyed, eager to get upstairs and into a hot bath and our nice warm bed. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Franklin, this is Mrs. Campbell. Old Mrs. Campbell."

"Oh, yes, hello," I said.

"Mrs. Franklin, I want to see you," she said.

"I'll be at the store at the usual time tomorrow," I promised her. "Twelve to three."

"No. I want to see you tonight."

"We're just on our way to bed," I said.

"Mrs. Franklin, do you remember what I told you this afternoon?"

"Yes," I said.

"You didn't laugh at me. You contradicted me, which wasn't polite, but you didn't laugh at me. You've never laughed at me, and I've given you plenty of cause. I've got to talk to you. I have to talk to someone and there isn't anybody else. It's terribly important."

"Won't tomorrow do as well as tonight?" I asked.

"No. I have to make up my mind by midnight. As far as I'm concerned there isn't any problem. It's Sylvie I'm worried about. I don't know whether or not I have any right to make a decision like this for Sylvie. It's her whole life."

"If it's that important I should think your son would be the one to talk to, not me."

"Him!" she cried in scorn. "He'd go right to Her. And they're both so Good. It's not that you're not *good*, of course, Mrs. Franklin. You're just not good in the same way. What I thought I'd do, if you don't mind, is walk over and have a few words with you. I won't keep you any longer than I can help. But you'll see when I get there how important it is, and that I can't take all the responsibility myself."

"Mrs. Campbell," I said swiftly, "it's much too cold for you to walk tonight!"

"I'll walk fast," she said, "and I have my old sealskin. Tonight I'm prepared for it. Last night I didn't even have my sweater. I'll start out on foot, and if you think it's so cold that you'd feel better if you came and picked me up in your car, I'll be on the look-out for you. But not your husband, please," she said in sudden warning; could she read my mind? "Just you." And before I could answer she had hung up, and I knew that almost immediately she would be putting on that old black sealskin coat and slipping

out of the house.

I turned to my husband. I had told him of the conversation at the store, and now I told him what Mrs. Campbell had said on the phone. "I'm worried about her," I said, "and in a funny sort of way I've grown fond of her. I'd better hop in the car and go over and see what's what."

"Don't you think you ought to call Jack and Alicia?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "I think I ought, but I'm not going to. It would be betraying her and I can't do it. I'm going to go get in the car and meet her. Okay?"

Sometimes I think my husband is too difficult to alarm. So I was a little surprised when he said, "Take Alexander with you. And if you're not back in a reasonable length of time, I'm coming after you."

"Okay," I said, and whistled for Alexander as I went out to the pantry and took my polo coat off the hook. Alexander's ancestry is unknown, but there are sizeable traces of both Great Dane and St. Bernard in him. He is gentle as a lamb and has raised our three children almost as well as Nana in **PETER PAN**, but he looks quite frightening, and his bark, if he thinks anyone is coming too close to any one of his family, will make a strong man sweat.

About half a mile from the Campbell house I saw two small, intense green lights, and two larger, duller ones, and then I realized it was the beams from the headlights of the car being caught and thrown back by Nyx's eyes and Mrs. Campbell's spectacles. Mrs. Campbell stopped and waited, and when I had drawn up beside her and opened the car door, she looked in carefully, saying, "You're sure your husband didn't come?"

"He's home with the children," I said reassuringly.

She looked at Alexander, and her face and voice were dubious. "I'm not sure about the dog."

"Oh, Alexander wouldn't hurt a flea," I said.

"It wasn't *that* I was worried about," she said with some asperity. Before she shut the door she leaned out of the car and called to the cat, "It's all right, Nyx."

In the glare of the headlights, Nyx waved his enormous tail menacingly, turned and disappeared into the bushes at the side of the road. Through the undergrowth I thought I could still see the two lamps of his eyes.

For quite a long time Mrs. Campbell just sat in the seat beside me, not speaking, but I could sense that she was trembling, very slightly, but constantly. Alexander, who had been sent to sit in the back, leaned over the front seat and nuzzled her gently. If Alexander hadn't done this, I think I would have started the car, driven old Mrs. Campbell home, and delivered her into the hands of Alicia and Jack, betrayal or no. I was thoroughly scared, and I felt that I had taken too much responsibility upon myself. If the old lady was spiraling into a mental breakdown, who was I to think I could handle it alone? But Alexander has a nose for illness and abnormality. Once a placid-looking salesman came to our door; a more innocuous man was never seen, but Alexander would not let him in the house. Hugh read in the paper the next day that he'd had a complete mental crack-up, assaulted a housewife in a neighboring village, and been taken to a mental hospital. If there were anything seriously wrong with Mrs. Campbell's mind, Alexander would not have nuzzled her so gently; it was one of his forms of giving the seal of approval.

Mrs. Campbell broke out of her trance, smiled at Alexander with very much the same warmth she usually reserves for Sylvie, and turned to me with a worried frown. "I don't know why your dog likes me," she said. "Dogs oughtn't to. Not under the circumstances."

But she *must* be batty!

"Turn off the lights, please, my dear. I'd rather we weren't seen. Just pull up a few yards and into that *dull* picnic area, will you please? Can you imagine people wanting to have picnics there in full view of every passer-by?"

I had to admit that it was a wonder to me, too, as I passed it on summer weekends with every table crowded, and tablecloths laid on the few bare patches in between. I drove into the small half-circle driveway, and though we would be able to see any car or small animal coming down the night road, I felt suddenly very alone and isolated.

"Mrs. Franklin," Mrs. Campbell demanded, "do you remember when you joined the church?"

"Why, yes," I said.

"Was it important to you? It mattered, didn't it?"

"Yes," I said. "It mattered very much or I wouldn't have done it."

"I knew I could trust you!" she cried triumphantly. "I've been watching you and testing you for a long time. You may not have realized it, but I have. I know you wouldn't be like those women who do it because everyone else is doing it, just the way they join a bridge club, or try to get their husbands to take out membership in the golf club. It ought to mean more than bridge or golf, oughtn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "though I do enjoy a good game of bridge once in a while. Haven't time for golf."

"Stop trying to keep this on a light plane. I know what you're trying to do. Humor me along because you think I'm mad. But in your heart, you're not quite sure, and that's why you're here with me at all. This isn't a light or laughing matter, Mrs. Franklin. It's deadly serious. Think how you felt when you made your decision to join the church. Think how you felt when the hour approached. That is the way I feel now."

Mrs. Campbell paused, but evidently she didn't expect me to say anything, because after a moment she went on. "We were talking about Alicia this afternoon, weren't we? Mrs. Franklin, everything Alicia stands for, I'm against. Now you're going to remind me that I come to church every Sunday with Alicia and Jack and the children. Yes. The church has meant a lot to me during my life. But now I go each Sunday because it's quiet, and I can sit and think what I want to think. It's noisy in our house, and Alicia thinks it's ungrandmotherly of me if I lock my door. But you see, Mrs. Franklin, I want to join another church now, and that's what I want to talk to you about, because if I do, I've promised to take Sylvie in with me. That's my problem, you see. Sylvie's not old enough to decide for herself, and do I have the right to do it? And I have to make my decision by midnight."

"What possible church would want this of you?" I asked uneasily.

"The church of the devil."

In the back of the car, Alexander moved uneasily, but he did not growl. The silence and darkness that pressed about us was like the silence and darkness that comes before a thunderstorm, but this was the fall of the year, and the night was clear and cold.

"I hope you don't mean that," I said finally.

"But I do. Alicia represents our church. Therefore I am against our church. But, like most thinking human beings, I feel the need of a god to worship and to go to for comfort and succour. Therefore I am going to the devil."

"All right," I said, "go to the devil if

you must, but you are quite right: you have no right to take Sylvie with you."

"But those are his terms," she said sadly. "My soul isn't enough. He wants Sylvie, too."

"That ought to show you he's not fit to worship."

"Oh, but he is! Make no mistake about it, Mrs. Franklin, he is! Have you read Milton's PARADISE LOST? Milton knew. He didn't intend to make Satan the hero of his greatest work, but that's exactly what he did. Oh, he's worth worshipping! And if God approves of people like Alicia, He doesn't want *me*, and the devil does. It's nice to be wanted, Mrs. Franklin. I haven't been wanted for a long time now."

"But — "

She did not allow me to speak. "Please. I have one more favor to ask of you and then I won't bother you again."

"What is it?" I asked warily.

"We're meeting at the Fair Grounds at five minutes before midnight. Please bring your car and park it just at the entrance to the Fair Grounds and wait there for half an hour. If I haven't come to you with Sylvie by then, you'll know that I've made my decision and what it is, and you can go home. If you care what happens to my soul — and I thing you *do* care about peoples' souls, Mrs. Franklin — you'll come. Won't you?"

"Yes," I said wearily. "I'll come."

"Aah!" She gave a great sigh of relief and leaned back. "There's my good girl!"

Had she hypnotized me? No, I can't shuffle off the responsibility like that. I did it of my own free will. I took her home, then went home myself and to bed quite normally, and when Hugh had gone to sleep, I got up and went downstairs and dressed and got back in the car and drove over to the entrance to the Fair Grounds.

I took Alexander with me. Maybe I thought this would appease Hugh a little when I told him about it later. Because I would have to tell him.

I sat there and waited in the dark. I don't smoke, but at that time I would have given anything for a cigarette to choke over, anything to occupy my hands and my mind. I thought of turning on the car radio and decided against it. In the eastern sky behind the Fair Grounds, a tired and ancient-looking moon rose, turning slowly from a large red flattened-out crescent to a small, dwindling white one. From the church steeple the slow deep strokes of midnight began to toll.

And still nothing happened. I counted the bells. Twelve of them. And still nothing. Had Mrs. Campbell made her decision? Did I really believe any of the wild tales she had told me?

Silence and darkness. I was shivering. Then across the Fair Grounds I saw two figures streaking, barely illuminated by the worn-out moon. It was Mrs. Campbell. Mrs. Campbell and Sylvie. They were running fast, much faster than I would have believed it possible for an old lady and a small child to run. Then it seemed that there were other figures streaking after them, gaining on them. I flung open the door of the car. In the seat beside me I could see the fur rise on Alexander's back. Before I could stop him, he jumped out of the car and went flashing across the field. The two small figures were slowing down, now, stumbling, exhausted.

"Hurry! Hurry!" I found myself screaming, the sound thin and frightened against the night.

Now they were covering the last few yards. And the dark, almost shapeless figures behind them were almost on them. "The sign of the cross!" Mrs. Campbell screamed. "Make the sign of the cross!"

Involuntarily I obeyed.

She and Sylvie flung themselves into the car as the two foremost following figures caught up with them. A great dark hairy figure. And behind him, blond hair flowing, eyes gleaming redly, angelic face alight with satanic fire — no, it couldn't be, it couldn't possibly be —

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" Mrs. Campbell screamed, and made the sign of the cross.

And suddenly the figures fled.

"Did you see her?" Mrs. Campbell demanded, her voice still an exhausted scream. "Did you see Alicia? It was one of her tricks all along! All the church work, all the being so good, just a trick to get our souls for Him! If it had been anybody but Alicia, I'd have done it, too! But now I shall go back to God, Mrs. Franklin, and to hell with the devil!"

She sank back against the seat of the car, exhausted. Sylvie climbed into her lap and twined her arms about her grandmother's neck. Alexander came racing across the field and jumped panting into the back and gave Mrs. Campbell's hat an affectionate nuzzle. He was holding something in his mouth; he had evidently taken a bite out of somebody's nether garments. His kiss seemed to rouse the old lady, and she said briskly, "Now if you'll just be kind enough to take us along home, Mrs. Franklin, I'll put Sylvie to bed. Oh, dear, I'll need keys tonight, won't I?" She looked through her handbag. "I have them! Now we won't have to disturb anybody."

I took them home and saw them safely into the darkened house. I went home myself and crawled into bed beside Hugh. In the morning when I wakened I told him about it, before the children were up and we were still lying together in bed. And he laughed.

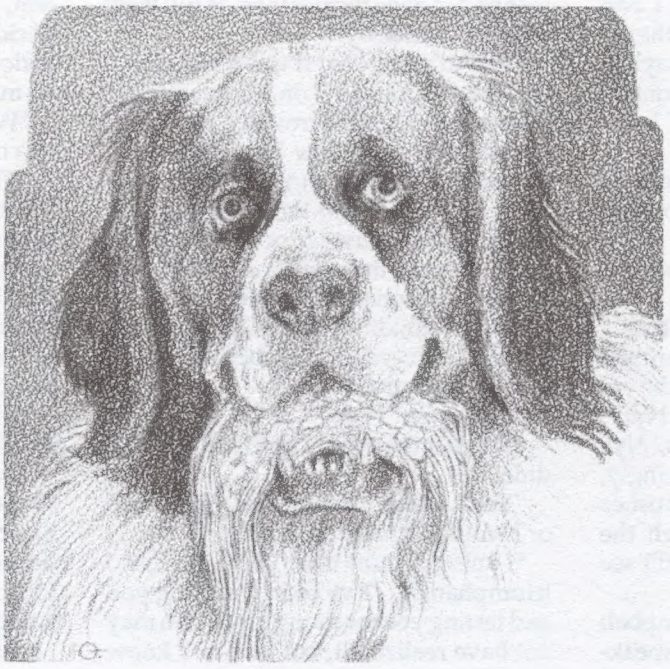
"It isn't funny," I said tensely.

He looked at me skeptically. "You don't believe it, do you?"

"Of course."

"You're still half asleep," he said. "Come on, wake up. Wake up!"

I got out of bed and went into my closet and plunged my hand down into the pocket of my coat. There it was, the thing I had taken from Alexander's teeth the night before, neither the skin of an animal nor cloth from the garment of a human being, a scrap of something red and rough and repulsively hairy.



MADELEINE L'ENGLE, best known for her Newbery Medal-award-winning novel **A WRINKLE IN TIME**, has written over twenty books — novels, children's stories, and essay collections — as well as plays and poems. She met her husband, Hugh Franklin (who later held the part of Dr. Tyler on television's *All My Children*), when they were both actors in New York City. They *did* run a general store in a small Connecticut town, but she assures us that the events in this tale are imaginary.

GEORGE BARR, who did all the artwork for "The Connecticut Eskimo", made his first professional art sale in 1960. He lives in San Jose, California, and has been providing illustrations for *FANTASY Magazine* since its first issue. He won the Hugo as Best Fan Artist in 1968 and has been nominated in both Fan Artist and Professional Artist categories.

Winners of last issue's CAULDRON voting:

Here are the winners of the voting for stories in issue #11.

FIRST PLACE:
"Be It Ever So Humble" – Tanya Huff

SECOND PLACE:
"The Robber Girl, the Sea Witch, and the Little Mermaid's Voice" – Phyllis Ann Karr

THIRD PLACE:
"Brontharn" – George Barr

Our congratulations to the winners, and our thanks to all of you who took the time to vote! Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at *FANTASY Magazine*.

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proudly presents:

Thursday, June 27, 6pm
Andrew Vachss, author of BLOSSOM, STREGA, BLUE BELLE, HARD CANDY, and FLOOD, signing his latest novel SACRIFICE [Knopf] and speaking on "Dangerous Characters: Child Abusers & the People Who Fight Them."

Friday, June 28, 6pm
Timothy Zahn, author of THE BLACKCOLLAR, COBRA, COBRA STRIKE, SPINNERET, and CASCADE POINT signs his new novel STAR WARS: HEIR OF THE EMPIRE, the first of a new STAR WARS trilogy that begins five years *after* the end of RETURN OF THE JEDI. "GEORGE LUCAS' SECRET STAR WARS PAPERS REVEALED!"

Friday, July 12th, 7:30pm
Apocalypse Culture Party with Adam Parfrey (author of APOCALYPSE CULTURE and RANTS). Presentation will include a really weird slide show. J.G. Ballard calls APOCALYPSE CULTURE "compulsory reading...This is an extraordinary collection unlike anything I have ever encountered-- a remarkable compilation of powerfully disturbing statements. These are the terminal documents of the twentieth century."

Friday, July 26th, 6pm (full moon tonight!)
Michael Cadnum, author of SLEEPWALKER, NIGHTLIGHT, and CALLING HOME will read from and sign his latest novel, SAINT PETER'S WOLF. We give this our highest recommendation. "Like Anne Rice's vampire novels, Cadnum reforms a hackneyed theme into something magical and memorable. Highly recommended for popular fiction collections."--Library Journal

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Friday, August 2, 6pm All-Star Multi-Author 15th Anniversary Celebration

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They Never Approve

by Selina Rosen

They had decided they didn't like her before I ever brought her home.

They didn't even give her a chance.

Ten minutes into dinner I saw Mom and Dad exchange that look. I know *that* look. It's the one that says they agree about something. It doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it invariably means that I'm in trouble.

But she hadn't *done* a thing. In fact, she couldn't have been behaving more properly if she had been trying, and she wasn't trying.

Virginia was always every bit the lady. That's why I liked her so much more than the girls I went to school with.

But *they* didn't like her.

She had impeccable manners. She was polite. She was courteous. She was intelligent.

None of *that* mattered.

She was wearing normal clothes, and she was beautiful.

That didn't matter either.

Only one thing mattered to them, and she wasn't out of the house five minutes when they started in on me. "Of all the girls you know . . . You have to bring one of *those* home."

I didn't stick around. I went to my room.

I slammed my door, but the door didn't stop me hearing them, and their words still stung my brain with the intensity of their disapproval.

It was always the same with them. No matter what I did. All I had to do was tell them that I had a girl friend and they promptly made up a list of what was acceptable and what was not.

Talking soon turned into screaming — sometimes my parents were louder when they were agreeing than when they were disagreeing. I didn't even try not to listen. Maybe I should have.

"I think I could have accepted anything but that!" My mother screamed.

"He's only sixteen. Let's just hope to God that it's only a schoolboy crush and that he'll grow out of it.

"If he lives through it," Mom screamed.

"I don't think anyone has died yet," my father reassured her.

"Lily Simmons' daughter Janet came close. She wound up in intensive care. My God, Bill, they had to give the girl three blood transfusions, or had you forgotten that? What do we do?"

"Tell him he can't see her anymore." I guess that sounded logical to my Dad.

"Oh come on, Bill. You know Steve. If you tell him he can't see her, that's just going to make him want to see her more."

My Dad gave a grunt of agreement. "Maybe we're over-reacting. Remember your parents' reaction to me . . ."

"Bill, you wore a leather jacket and rode a motorbike. When you were feeling really rebellious, maybe you smoked a little reefer. This girl is a *vampire*. She sucks out people's blood."

My mother was obviously outraged that my father would even think to link the two together. "There's a big difference."

"Okay, okay, Ellen. Calm down. What I was trying to say was that it's just a fad. A disgusting and perverted one, but really no different than any of the others, and like all the others, this one will die out. Besides, I don't think Steve wants to be a vampire. He just likes the girl."

"Bill, think about what you just said. I went with you all of five days when I put on a leather jacket and climbed on the back of your motorbike. A week later I was smoking grass with you. Steve is totally infatuated with this girl. How long can it be before he's wearing solid black, slicking hair back with grease, and sleeping in inversion boots? After that, it won't be long till he's drinking blood."

"You're right. All we can do is tell him he can't see her anymore. I know it's weak, but what else can we do? If we have to lock him in his room, I don't want him seeing this girl anymore." My father's words were firm and final, and meant not a damn thing.

"Short of locking him in his room I don't see how we can stop him seeing her, and as I told you, forbidding him to see her is just going to make him want to see her more."

"What else can we do?" Dad's voice raised a pitch. "If you've got any better ideas, why don't we hear *them*?"

Mom made a bunch of gurgling sounds which meant that she was out of ideas.

I couldn't take any more.

They didn't understand love.

They didn't understand anything.

GIANA

I stormed out of my room. I guess I just wanted to say my piece.

"You're just like everyone else!" I said accusingly. "You don't even try to understand. We live in a world where nothing is sure. At any minute, some bureaucrat somewhere could punch a button and we could all go up in a puff of nuclear smoke. Vampires are just trying to improve their chances of survival. How can you put them down for that? They don't fly through the night and suck out the blood of unsuspecting victims. They don't take anyone's blood. All their donors give willingly. It's done very cleanly, just like in the hospital. No huge fangs digging into flesh. What happened to Janet Simmons was her own fault. Some people get off on having their blood drunk. Janet gave to three separate groups that day. None of them knew she had given already."

Mother looked at Father, and gave him the famous *Where have we gone wrong?* look.

Dad shook his head in disbelief and shame, and almost looked at me for a second, something which he had avoided doing for years.

Then Mother broke into tears. "My God, Steve," she sobbed, "have you listened to what you're saying? Drinking blood!" She shrieked. "Human blood, for Christ's sake!"

She had always done that. Probably because it had always worked. She'd tried reasoning with me, now she'd cry, and if that didn't work, later she could always try her secret weapon — *threats*.

I stood my ground and didn't bat an eye. I knew what I was talking about. I was talking about vampirism, and it was a sure bet that I knew a lot more about that than they did. There are more kinds of vampires in this world than those that feed on blood.

My parents were vampires. Instead of blood, they fed on people's spirit, their souls. They used and manipulated people. My father as a lawyer, my mother as a real estate agent, had both ruined their share of people, and they had never given it a second thought.

But let someone drink a little blood, and they were mortified.

They were being hypocrites, and I told them so.

They both started talking, or rather screaming, at once. There wasn't too much that was actually coherent. But it was obvious that, among other things, they thought I was warped, ungrateful, and being led around by my nose, that Virginia was pulling the string.

Finally, Mother out-screamed Father. "You're not like this, Steve. Listen to yourself. You're defending these people. It's that girl. She's filling your head with a bunch of nonsense...."

"It's not nonsense," I said. My anger slapped at the back of my teeth, trying to find the words with which to escape. I finally had to be happy at just blurting out, "I have my own brain. Virginia doesn't tell me what to do or what to think."

They both started screaming at once again, and I went back to my room. I don't even think they knew that I had gone. They had never dealt with me as their offspring. They always dealt with me as a problem. One they could never quite solve.

I lay on my bed and listened to them trying to blame something or someone for my behavior.

Thirty minutes of *It's that girl's fault*. Followed by thirty minutes each of *It's your fault, It's your mother's fault, It's the school's fault*, and finally back to *It's that girl's fault*!

As usual, someone was at fault, and it wasn't either of them.

I sneaked out of the house. It wasn't that hard. They were so preoccupied with trying to figure out how they could keep me locked in my room that I walked right out of it and out the front door without either of them seeing me.

I walked the street, hands in pockets, head down. This was all my fault. I should have known better than to bring Virginia to meet them. They were selfish jerks.

Because I had really thought they would like her. Because for once I thought that they might actually approve of my choice.

I am a damned fool. I always have been, and I probably always will be.

My misery folded in on itself, and at that time, I had no idea where I was or where I was going. I was just walking. Trying to put some distance between myself and the screaming back at the house. Trying to find some peace of mind.

I never did.

Looking back now, I can only conclude that it was fate which guided my unsure footsteps.

My tangled thoughts were interrupted by sound. Sirens! They were close. Too close. The cop car whisked past me.

It took me a few seconds to realize what that lump in the road ahead was. It wasn't till I saw all the cop cars that it really shot home.

It was a body. I froze in place for a second. That sweater. The red sweater with the white stars on it. I'd only seen one like it. The one that belonged to Janet Simmons.

I started moving again, towards the body. Why I don't really know. Morbid curiosity, I guess. I wanted to see what Janet looked like. Maybe I wanted to see if she were really dead. Or maybe fate was still guiding me, and I had no choice over where I went.

I was almost upon the scene when someone hollered out, "There's one of them!"

There were sirens and cop cars and ambulances and confusion. It was several moments before I realized the man was pointing at me.

I ran. I didn't want to face the fury or the outrage in the crowd. Didn't want to try to explain that this was the worst thing that could have happened for Virginia and her kind. Because now there was a confirmed death and that would mean witch hunts and persecution tenfold what it had been.

I had no doubt that if the mob caught me, they would pound a stake through my heart and ask questions later. I ran through yards and jumped fences, but I was never a fast runner, and they were closing in on me. Then, suddenly, someone grabbed me and pulled me back into the bushes. I struggled. I started to scream, and a hand was wrapped firmly across my mouth. I bit it, and my attacker let out a muffled cry as my mouth filled with blood. The blood was warm and sweet and I swallowed. I almost instantly felt different, and I knew that whoever had grabbed me was not human. I looked up into Virginia's pained eyes. All struggling ceased. Virginia removed her hand and held it.

I started to apologize, and she put a finger over my lips. I could hear my pursuers all around us. They were so close I held my breath.

Then they gave up and moved on.

"I'm sorry," I told Virginia when I was sure it was safe. "I didn't know it was you."

"You have no idea how sorry you will be," her voice was sad and distant; I felt instantly chilled. "Steve, it's too late to go

back now. We better get out of here before they come back."

She took my hand, and I followed. Nothing mattered. I was with Virginia, and no matter the reason, I was happy just to be with her, to feel her hand in mine.

Her hand in mine! Wasn't this the hand I had just bitten? It felt warm and smooth and undamaged. I stopped suddenly and jerked the hand into my field of vision. It was clear. I checked the other. No sign of the bite. I began to wonder if perhaps I had imagined the whole thing, but the taste of blood still hung sweet in my mouth.

I looked at Virginia, who displayed a set of very healthy fangs. "It's not just a game we're playing, Steve." She kissed me ever so gently on the lips. "Join me, Steve."

I would have followed her to the ends of the earth and back. She was the first girl I had ever loved. Correction, she was the only *woman* I *ever* loved.

I went with her. Their den was in a back alley in the basement of an abandoned warehouse. She shared the dwelling with three male vampires. I was a little upset about that.

So were they.

"Damn it, Virginia," one said, "not another one."

I found out later the reason for such an outburst. The boy (or Billy, as I later came to know him) had been her first. They called him Count.

Billy had never understood Virginia's needs. The rest of them did, and I soon learned.

"Chill, Count. This is not time for one of your tantrums. Janet Simmons is dead," Virginia said. There were a few moments of absolute silence.

"You do it?"

I recognized the boy; it was Larry. Now, I knew Larry real well. We had grown up on the same block. We had played in little league together. We had been caught trying to drill a hole in the wall so we could watch the girls' shower. But what I never would have guessed was that he was a vampire. Larry just wasn't the type. He was shy, quiet, the absolute last person you would expect to be drinking blood.

Before I go any further, let me dispel some myths about vampires.

The sun does not kill vampires. Grant you, it does hurt their eyes a little, but a good pair of Polaroids will take care of that.

Crosses and garlic have no effect on them. Or holy water, or any of that stuff.

They do have a reflection.

They don't turn into bats.

A wooden stake through the heart will kill them. But so will a bullet in the same place. Their heart is their weak spot.

Maybe this is going to sound like I am really stupid. But until Larry asked, it had never entered my mind that Virginia might have killed Janet. Or maybe I just knew Virginia enough to know that she couldn't do such a thing.

"No, I didn't," Virginia said hotly.

"Don't act too holier-than-thou, Virgi." Someone else I knew! Stewart! I had always liked Stewart. But right then, I could have slapped him. "We all drink blood. You more than us. And she was one of your favorite donors." It was the way he said it that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. He didn't care whether she had killed Janet or not. He just didn't want her to lie about it.

"I haven't been to Janet for blood since I found out she was giving to other groups," Virginia defended herself.

"Get real, Stewart. You know Virginia doesn't like to share." Count drew his words out, and his lip curled into a snarl as he stared at me with utter contempt.

"I really don't have time for this stuff," Virginia's voice was filled with rage and an authority I had never heard her use before. To my amazement, even Count looked frightened.

"What is it? What happened?" The arrogance had completely left Stewart's voice.

"The cops were there. In force. They chased Steve. If they had caught him, they would have lynched him."

"Can they link him to you?" the Count asked, the anger daring to enter his voice again.

"I should think so," Stewart said, looking at his nails. "She's been sporting him for weeks."

Larry asked the obvious question. "Was it a vampire kill?"

"Yes."

"Will the cops know that?" Larry asked nervously.

"They already do." Virginia's brow knotted up with worry."

"You do it?" Count asked me.

I was more than a little taken aback. Till then, they had talked about me as if I were a nonentity. I think I was more shocked at being acknowledged than by the accusation. "I didn't kill her," I screamed at him, then added in a purely childish manner, "Maybe I did!"

They laughed at me then. They all did. Except Virginia.

"Can the laugh track, jerks. We've got a real problem on our hands, here. Thanks to Janet's carelessness, every vampire in this city is going to be under suspicion. Us more than the others. We're going to have to hide out till this all blows over."

"What about feeding?" Steve asked hungrily.

Virginia looked tired, rubbed her eyes. "Dawn approaches. Let's get some sleep."

Virginia took me to a secluded part of the warehouse. That was a private time. A time for her and me, and no one else.

It never came to mind to think about what my parents might be thinking or doing. It never occurred to me that at the happiest moment in my life they were making moves to destroy me.

"Look at this." I woke up to Stewart screaming and something thrown in my face. It took a few moments for me to come fully aware of my surroundings. By the time I sat up, Virginia was already reading the paper. She sighed deeply. "What now, Virgi?" Stewart asked in a panic. "What do we do now?"

"For starters we all calm down." It wasn't a suggestion when Virginia said it; it was a command. "The worst thing we can do right now is panic."

Count entered the room. "I think the solution is simple. Let Steve go back to his parents."

"What if I don't want to go back to my parents?" I screamed. "What does this have to do with me anyway?"

Virginia handed me the paper then. "High School Girl Killed by Local Vampire Gang" was the headline. I read on. Basically it was pretty much what we had expected.

Till you got to the third paragraph.

Steven Johnson, a 16-year-old friend of the deceased, walked up to the murder scene and was taken hostage by the gang. The authorities suspect.... My parents were offering a reward for any information leading to my safe return.

I didn't read on. Obviously, my father had used his clout to turn my running away into a kidnapping. There was only one thing to do and I knew it, but I didn't do it.

"He's got to go back," Stewart said. "You can see that, can't you, Virgi?"

"It'll be bad enough over Janet's death, but add kidnapping to that and they won't be happy till they hunt us down

and kill us all." Surprisingly, Count's voice was calm.

Virginia's voice was even cooler. "He's one of us now. He belongs to us."

"To you, you mean!" Count's calm shattered. "You don't give a damn what happens to him. Or any of us, for that matter. If he goes back...."

"He needs blood...."

"It's not too late for him, *yet*. He could break free. He could remain normal...."

"I'm sure he doesn't want to, Count. Who in their right minds would choose to be normal when they could be immortal?" Virginia held up her hand as he started to continue. "Count, you're just hungry. We'll feel better after we eat."

"And just how are we going to feed?" It was Larry who came to Count's defense. "Count's right. With Janet dead, the heat is on anyway. How are we going to feed with him around? They think we kidnapped him, for God's sake!"

"They're right." What they said made perfect sense, and I managed to keep my hormones at bay long enough to figure it out. "I should go back, just to take the heat off."

"No!" Virginia was adamant. "We all stay together."

"You're being unreasonable, Virgi," Count said, regaining some of his calm now that the tide seemed to have turned his way.

Virginia turned to him and smiled smugly. "Oh, am I, Bright Boy? Then how about this? Let's say Steve goes back. Do you really think that's going to take the heat off? No. The main issue there is Janet's death. They'll question Steve." I watched as Count's face sank. He knew the words she spoke were true.

"I won't tell." I was a little hurt by the accusation, but I didn't want to go, and I secretly hoped they would find a reason why I *couldn't*.

"You wouldn't want to," it was Stewart who spoke, "but you would. They would word a question cleverly, and...." He threw up his hands in exasperation. "So, what now, Virgi? I don't know about everyone else, but I'm hungry." Larry and Count nodded in agreement.

"It will be dark soon. We are creatures of the night. It will conceal and protect us. We will hunt and we will feed."

At night, we dressed all in black and took to the streets: the dark ones on the old side of town, where only hoods, hookers, derelicts, and politicians — around election time — go. We found a willing donor right away. We all went into a dark alley and then the tube and bags came out. Now, I was the kid that passed out the one time in my life I had a blood test, so I was a little shocked at my reaction to the blood-taking ritual. I watched the blood flow into the bag from the tube in the man's arm and felt no nausea. Instead, there was a strange feeling of satisfaction. When the bag was full, we paid the man and went on hunting.

"Just a little now, Virgi," Stewart begged. "I'm starving."

"Don't be a fool, man," Count said hotly. "Last thing we need is to have someone catch us feeding."

Thirty minutes later we found another willing donor. With both bags full, we went "home".

I'll never forget that first time. I had to force myself to drink the first few drops. The next thing I remember, Stewart was cussing me and taking the bag away. It was the total fulfillment of all I had ever dared to dream. I felt like I could do anything, go anywhere. I realized that to a vampire, blood isn't just a food — it's a drug. It becomes your way of life, and then you can never go home.

For about a week, we had to be extra careful, and then everything seemed to cool down. Like any news story, after it's told fifty times, it loses its impact.

We were able to move a little more freely around town, which is to say that there wasn't a cop around every corner we turned.

Then the powers-that-be decided that Janet's death was not a form of murder at all, but a form of suicide.

Vampires were once again free to walk the streets.

Except me. I was still officially missing. Although now they were saying that I had probably run away.

Most nights I got left at the warehouse alone. I felt left out but had to agree that it was an added risk that we shouldn't take too often.

Except for that, I couldn't complain about my life. I had my friends, I had Virginia, and I had plenty of blood.

Then some stupid jerk went berserk. He used his teeth for more than show, and chewed up some poor hooker. Then he killed a wino.

Then a cop.

After that, no vampire was safe on the streets, and the blood supply dried up. No one was willing to give blood if they thought they might be chewed up. Even the derelicts wanted a stiffer price, and we were running out of money. Some of the other groups were resorting to violence. They would abduct their donors, tie them up, and take the blood.

For all practical purposes, they were mugging people for their blood.

Virginia refused to do this, so we went hungry a lot.

I watched the sun rise through the tears in my eyes. My path was clear. I turned on the radio, and the morning news confirmed my fears. My life had been shattered. I dug around till I found my old clothes. The clothes that weren't black. The ones I had been wearing the night my life had begun. It was appropriate that I should wear them on the day when that life was destroyed.

"The young woman was shot 17 times before she fell dead...."

I slung the radio into the wall. I found a pair of sunglasses. I dried my tears and put the glasses on. It had been a long time since I had been outside in the daylight. I didn't like it.

I now see the light for what it is: the enemy of man. For nothing can hide in it. All that is ugly in man can be seen clearly only in the light. The dark hides man's ugliness and, for that matter, his beauty. In darkness, all men are equal. No one can judge you if they can't see you. That is why so many fear the dark.

They fear what they cannot judge.

When I got to the house, no one was home. I showered and changed into the black garments I had brought with me. I sat down in the living room and turned on the TV. I watched soaps. The news came on at 12:00, and I damn near turned it off.

I should have.

They were saying that Virginia, Larry, Stewart, and Count were the "Killer Vampires". I suppose that cleaned things up for them for a while, till the killing started again. I wanted them all dead. The cops, the newsmen, and the killer vampire who had ruined everything.

But all that would have to wait. First, I had to get some money. If my parents had taught me one thing, it was that you can't get anywhere without that. Then I had to make everyone believe that I was a normal, mundane person. My parents had always been great at that. No one would have ever guessed that they harbored all that hidden neurosis. Once I

had money and had proved I was "normal", then I could take everyone down. One at a time.

I smiled and waited. It was all so simple. If only I had thought of it before. It was too late for the others. For Virginia.

I couldn't think about them. If I did, I would be dragged down into despair and become unable to avenge their deaths. I thought this all out in the hours that I sat waiting for my parents to return.

When I heard the key turn in the lock, all I could feel was a sense of anti-climax. I heard someone enter, and a sack of groceries hit the floor.

"My God.... Steve, is that you?"

"It's me, Mom." I stood up and turned to face her.

"My God, you're one of *them*." I heard the disgust and disapproval in her voice. They never had approved. Not once. Of anything.

I smiled, showing my fangs. "Tell me, do you and Dad still have that giant life insurance policy naming me as beneficiary?" Her eyes grew large as I approached. "Did you ever think of how ironic it is that they call it *life* insurance?"

❧

SELINA ROSEN writes, "I have done blue collar type work most of my life. It's safe to say that this, at least, taints most of my work – I think in a positive way. I tend to see things from the working class view. Most of my characters do as well.

"I enjoy setting my fantasies in a modern urban setting.

"Now I will tell you that I am a card carrying member of the SCA – Knight's Marshal of the local group to boot – and you will know that I am truly twisted.

"I owe a great deal of thanks to Misty Lackey, who has been a constant help to me, and who has been a good friend."

ALAN GIANA lives in Connecticut. He has exhibited work at Boskone and other East Coast science fiction conventions. His contemporary style matches the author's urban setting for this story.

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Artwork by James Balkovek

Slag

by Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck

The midday sun hammered on the anvil of Derkhan in the desert kingdom of Alfar. The Sign of the Flaming Goose, near the Rising Sun Gate, had few patrons. There were only six newly arrived travelers, gathered about one of the scarred tables.

"I tell you, I was worried," said Uman.

"If you had doubts about the plan, this is the first that I have heard of it," replied Sakar to his second in command.

"Oh, I had no doubts about the plan. My doubts were over whether we would get away from those guards," returned Uman.

"I began to fret a bit when they pursued us across the border into Alfar," put in Iroc, in his tan burnoose. "When we came into sight of Derkhan's walls I wondered if those Royal Kelin Guards were ever going to quit."

"All that fuss over a mere trifle. All that we did was take a few dishes and such," said Arton ironically.

"Maybe it was due to the dishes and such being solid gold," Uman returned. "Or perhaps it was the fact that King Imbon was having a banquet off them at the time."

Sakar stood up and gazed thoughtfully at the mud-plastered walls of the taproom. "Whatever we do, we cannot sell King Imbon's banquet service until we melt it down to safely anonymous ingots. I have had enough wine for now, so I will ask about for discreet help."

His inquiries led him into the shop of Aidric, on Red Lantern Way. Aidric was a stooped man of indeterminate years with a beard much singed. His robe was patched, and any color that it may once have had was long gone. His shop was filled with furnaces, athanors, and other alchemic equipage.

"Yes, I can melt some gold for you. This day, if you like. The cost will be one ingot of each ten."

"What! I thought that I was the robber here. One in twenty."

"Firewood is dear, in a desert town. One in twelve."

"We'll bring our own wood. One in nineteen."

In the end, they settled on one in fourteen.

That afternoon, Sakar and his thieves were at the shop of Aidric the alchemist. He proved to be skilled at the firing of his furnaces and also quite voluble.

"Here, you folks want to use number four, over in that corner. Number three is larger but it has a crack in the lining.

"Don't you know anything about furnaces? Use less wood and pile it so. There now, keep a steady draft with those bellows; not so hard. That's it, avoid any hot spots, they'll cause cracks in the furnace or the crucible.

"Seeing this gold reminds me of my youth," he looked into the furnace, singeing his eyebrows. "That's going nicely. Keep it that way. I have to tend number two for a while." He shuffled across the shop to his furnace. Sakar followed him across the packed dirt floor.

"What I have in here is an experiment. I am searching for the red stone of the philosophers. If I ever find it I will live for ages. It is the yellow stone that makes gold.

"I wasted my youth in search for the yellow stone. I never found it. All that came of those years was a depilatory much used by the girls who work Red Lantern Way. It is the foundation of my practice. That's it cooking down in the big athanor.

"I gave up on the yellow stone and turned my energy to the search for the red stone. It is the only true object of alchemy. If I find it, all the ages to come are mine. Then, I will be able to search for the yellow stone and other wonders."

Sakar watched and listened in amazement. It was not long before the first gold was ready to pour into ingots. As his men poured the gold, Sakar said, "Aidric, you said that you have an experiment in this furnace. How come there is no fire?"

"For the excellent reason that I am done with the fire. Now I am cooling it off. If all goes well, I will have a red glassy lump. Come, let us see."

They approached the furnace and looked within. The crucible was fire-

darkened and half full of a porous black glass. Aidric's shoulders slumped. "Slag, more damned slag. The worst of it is that the crucible is wasted too."

Feeling sorry for the old alchemist, Sakar offered, "Get me a chisel and let me see if I can salvage your crucible for you."

"Your kindness does you credit, young man. Here is a chisel."

After working busily for several minutes, Sakar looked up and said, overcarefully, "You say that you have had other failures like this? Other crucibles full of slag?"

"A great many, young man. They are piled out behind the shop. Why do you ask?"

"I believe that I can sell them to a brick maker, after I shatter them down small enough. Would a copper apiece be too little? They are just in your way, now."

"Done," cried Aidric, "I will even lend you a cart to carry them away."

The rest of the thieves gathered about as Sakar loaded his strange booty onto the cart. As soon as the last of the ingots was cool, they divided the gold with Aidric and pushed the cart out into the street.

Puffing a bit, Uman queried, "Why did you buy up all this trash?"

To which Sakar replied with a grin, "Well, he didn't want them. He was just throwing them out. Under all this slag, it's gold!"

❧

GLEN AND CONNIE TEN-EYCK have been married for six years. They live in Portland, Oregon, and are active in the Society for Creative Anachronism. They share an apartment with house plants and a cockatiel named Lord Byrdkyns the Bold of Bolingbroke.

"Slag" is their first story to see print.

JAMES BALKOVEK lives in Antioch, California, and has done numerous illustrations for Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine.*

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Yorkshire Luck

by Bob Liddil

MacCallister took a long quaff of fine Guinness from his pint pot, then stared at the Yank in full disbelief.

"I'm telling you that it's absolutely true," the Yank insisted. He was a huge man, 25 stone or better, six foot five and wearing it gracefully. As a businessman, he came and went freely between America and the small West Yorkshire town of Barnsley, visiting so often he was considered a regular at the White Horse Pub.

"Underneath that bar," the Yank continued, "is a box with five hundred years of Yorkshire luck inside it. Five *hundred* years of luck just waiting for somebody to win it."

"Assuming for the sake of argument that I even believe you for a moment," MacCallister said, "if there's that much luck attaching it to its owner, then how could anyone ever hope to win it? And for that matter, if it's so valuable, why would anyone risk losing it?"

The Yank gave off a little chuckle and said, in a confidential lowering of his voice, "That's the beauty of it. According to legend, the box has to be placed at risk on the first night of the full moon, each month it is in the possession of its owner. That night is the *one* time of the month when the luck within the box does not affect the odds of its owner winning or losing. It's always an even bet on that particular night."

MacCallister drained the remaining stout from his glass and signaled that he wished another, then rose from the table and moved to the uncrowded bar to fetch it. The Yank joined him and also ordered another. The barman returned with both pints, delivered them and then gave MacCallister a quizzical sideways glance. "What kind of rubbish has this 'un been feeding you?" he asked.

MacCallister laughed and replayed the Yank's tale of fantastic luck contained within a single box. When he'd finished, the barman said, "Well, pal, to be perfectly honest, that story's true."

"I don't believe it," MacCallister exclaimed.

"Here, I'll prove it to you," the barman said, and pulled from his pocket a deck of cards. "Pontoon, that's a game we enjoy." He handed the deck to MacCallister. "Blackjack, I believe you Yanks call it." Then he reached under the bar, fetched forth a small plain wooden box and placed it on the bar. "You put up fifty pence, I'll put up the box. Try and win it from me."

MacCallister had always been lucky at cards and he took up the challenge with gusto. The barman won 125 straight hands of blackjack, a statistical improbability that ranks well up with the odds of finding Prince Charles panhandling in the underground station at Piccadilly, at midnight. No matter who dealt the cards, or how cleverly he played, MacCallister could not win. By last call, he was convinced of the truth of this and paid his tab and his losses like a true sportsman.

The Yank was absolutely beside himself with I-told-you-so. "Do you see now what a golden opportunity this is? The first day of the full moon is only two days from now. You could *take* that box and five hundred years of Yorkshire luck right along with it."

MacCallister was feeling a little put back by 125 straight losing hands of blackjack and said testily, "You're so enthusiastic about this. Why aren't you trying to win it?"

"There's the rub," the Yank said sadly, "If you win it, you do, but only five challenges a month are allowed and once you've tried and succeeded, you're never allowed to try again."

"Succeeded? What do you mean succeeded? You mean you *had possession of that box*? And then you *lost* it?"

"It's true," the Yank admitted. "A couple of years ago, I won the box. I won all the luck of Yorkshire, all wrapped up in that box. For that whole month, I played slot machines, the bingo houses, bet on the horses. For that whole month, I couldn't lose at anything. But I had agreed – as you will have to, if you try for it – to bring back the box on the first day of the next full moon and wager it against a pint. I knew I could keep it. I *knew* I could win it permanently. I practiced blackjack until I could count the cards in my sleep. I won a fortune in cash with that box. But I had to bet it to keep the luck and in the end, he won it back."

MacCallister sipped his beer silently for several minutes without saying anything. He seemed lost in thought. Finally, he motioned for the bartender to come over.

"What are the rules? What do I have to do to try for the box?"

"Are you sure you want to do this, pal?" He seemed genuinely concerned.

"How could I not be?" MacCallister said with a twinkle in his eye. "Five hundred years of Yorkshire luck all wrapped up nice and neat. Thousands to be made on any enterprise requiring luck. How could I not be sure?"

"Then you be here an hour before moonrise, day after tomorrow. And bring cash..." Then he smiled and gave off a wink, "'cause we don't take American Express."

Two days later, MacCallister returned to the White Horse, intent on winning. He'd spent his time well, in libraries in both Barnsley and in York, studying up on all the subtleties of blackjack, as well as other popular English gambling games (just in case). The Yank had arrived ahead and was already going at his pint, when he spotted him coming into the main bar room.

"MacCallister," he greeted his countryman warmly. "You're actually going to try for it?"

"I'm ready," MacCallister proclaimed, "thirsty, but ready."

A pint had already been pulled for him and was delivered at the same instant he touched the bar.

"Are you ready to try your luck?" The barman held a brand new pack of cards in his hand.

"I am," MacCallister said. Reaching into his pocket, he brought forth a roll of fifty-pence coins. He placed one on the counter and added, "Where is the box?"

The barman bent down under the counter, reached behind a row of glasses, and fetched the box. It was a small, unobtrusive object that seemed to be made of leather. Shaped like a tiny miniature treasure chest, it had a tiny clasp on it which held the top closed. The finish was rough, like leather might be, and its color was a deep brown. Even if

it had held no luck at all, it would be a great keepsake of England for MacCallister to take home to America, if only he could win.

They began playing pontoon, fifty pounds against the box. Everyone in the pub gathered around to see if this American would win the luck the way the Yank had some time earlier. The rules were simple. MacCallister could play until he decided to stop, ran out of money, or won the box. He figured that even odds (if that could be believed) were in his favor, and sooner or later, he would win the box. But as time wore on, it began to look like all the luck was with the bartender.

After twenty straight losses in a row, MacCallister said, "What if we change the game?"

"It certainly is permitted," the bartender replied. "What would you like to play?"

MacCallister winked toward the yank and said, "Poker. Good old American stud poker. Do you know the game?"

The bartender laid down the cards one by one and by the time the hand was fully dealt, the winner was foregone. MacCallister had three aces showing and a huge grin on his face from the hole cards.

"Four aces," he declared. "Four *aces!*"

The bartender, who had three queens face up, flipped his hole cards to reveal a pair of sixes. "Four aces wins," He announced. "Drinks for the house."

While the company crowded forward to receive free pints, the former owner of the Yorkshire luck pulled aside the new owner to offer him some words of advice.

"You've won it fair and square, Mr. MacCallister, but to be perfectly honest, I'm doubtful that you've been done a favor. You must use this wisely or it can be your undoing. Do you understand?"

MacCallister thoughtfully nodded affirmation.

"There is just one more thing you haven't been told," the barman continued, "that I'm tellin' you now. Under no circumstances must you ever, *ever* open this box. Five hundred years of Yorkshire luck must never be allowed to escape from its place of keeping." With that, he handed MacCallister the box. "Remember, one month from today, on the eve of the next full moon, you must return to allow me a chance to win back the box. If you win a second time, it's yours forever."

The next hour or so was spent in celebration. MacCallister had plans for the millions of dollars he would make with the luck in the box. State lotteries, Las Vegas, the possibilities were limitless. He held the box up to the light above the table at which he and the Yank sat.

"It's hard to believe," he said finally, "that so much could come from something so small." He stood and slipped the box into his trousers pocket.

"Headed back to the hotel?" the Yank inquired.

"No, just going for a walk to stretch my legs a little," was the reply.

MacCallister exited the White Horse to a chorus of well wishes from those patrons of the pub who were still bending an elbow. Outside, the full moon was just rising over the moors, huge in its position above the horizon. What a great night for a walk, it was, and he did just that. He walked straight out of the parking lot, turned onto Crooked Creek Lane and strolled along meadow's edge, drinking in his good fortune. When he reached the center of the bridge across Crooked Creek, he paused to enjoy the reflection of the moonlight on the water.

He pushed his hand into his pocket and retrieved the box. *The* box. Five hundred years of Yorkshire luck and it was all his. Dreams of grand wealth washed over him again like a tide. Absently, he shook the box next to his ear.

It rattled.

Now *that* woke him up. Something was inside the box.

"Under no circumstances must you ever, ever open this box." The bartender's

Artwork by Shirley Jowise

ever, ever open this box." The bartender's words floated back to him on the breath of breeze that now kissed the moors.

"Nobody will ever know," he said aloud, "if I just take a quick peek."

Very carefully, so as not to leave any evidence of tampering, he opened the box.

"My god," he breathed, "it's beautiful."

The box contained a ring. Gold it was. It glowed in the moonlight, and a circular inlay against a jade background glittered in diamonds. It looked like it would be a perfect fit.

"So, this is Yorkshire luck." Right then and there, he placed the ring over the third finger of his left hand.

There arose a fog over Crooked Creek Lane. It rolled off the meadow and covered the dirt way in a matter of no more than a minute. No more than a foot in depth, it glowed white-silver, marking the path back to the Barnsley Road and the White Horse.

MacCallister suddenly felt both ill and panicked, nauseated and frightened. His balance suddenly slipped away from him and he was dizzy, like too many beers had come his way. The moon over the moors seemed a lot larger than it had been only seconds earlier, and brighter as well. He felt odd, very very odd. Then everything went black, and as he sank to the wooden floor of the bridge, the empty box rolled out of his hand and into the waters of Crooked Creek.

A voice came from somewhere deep inside a well. "Wake up. Wake up. Come on, MacCallister, wake up."

He opened his eyes. Slowly, everything came back into focus. He was flat on his back, staring up *into the face of a wolf!* There were more than one of them. There were five, no seven – *werewolves* – MacCallister had seen enough TV to know what they looked like. Seven werewolves and the Yank were standing over him, and it was the Yank who was doing the talking.

"Are you OK? You passed out."

MacCallister lifted one of his hands into his field of vision. He had a sinking feeling that he already knew what he would see. Sure enough, it was true. He himself wore the same heavily haired, pawed, clawed hand and arm as he could plainly see on those standing over him. As he was helped to his feet, he felt his face.

"Oh, god, oh, god," he moaned, "I'm a werewolf."

"Come on, now, stop whining," the Yank chided, "it's not all that bad."

"Easy for *you* to say standing there without a fur coat or fangs!"

"Just lucky, I guess," the Yank said. "Come on now, we've got to get you back to the pub."

The walk back down Crooked Creek Lane to the Barnsley road resembled ten minutes from a Lon Chaney movie. Every so often, they would stop and lift voice in harmonized howl to the risen full moon. Having done so, they pressed on until at last they reached the end of the path.

"Right," someone said, "try and behave now, lads."

They stepped onto the Barnsley Road and had traveled no more than thirty feet when headlights rounded a curve on the far side of the pub and sped toward them. Impulsively, MacCallister broke away from the group and loped out into the center of the road. He snarled at the oncoming car, making threatening gestures and causing it to screech to a halt.

Three corralled MacCallister and escorted him back to the shoulder. A fourth apologized to a badly shaken matron in the car.

"Awfully sorry, Missus. He's an American, you know."

She stepped on the gas, chirped the tires, and sped away.

"Really, Mr. MacCallister, mustn't chase autos," someone said. The group repaired to the inside of the pub without further incident.

"He'll be needing a beer," called the Yank as they entered.

"He'll be needing a *whiskey*," corrected MacCallister, "and an explanation, I think."

"Well, pal, I did tell you not to open the box," offered the bartender, now a lean dark-haired lycanthrope in a bartender's costume.

"It's the ring that does it," the Yank said. "Once you open the box, there's no way you can resist that ring."

"Which reminds me," the bartender said, "gi'e it up."

The entire inside of the White Horse pub, crowded as it was, was populated by werewolves. Large ones and small, fat ones and thin, old ones and gray, young ones, as well. In fact, the Yank was the only still human-appearing individual in the whole pub.

"Why...?" began MacCallister.

"No curiosity," answered the Yank before he could continue. "George here said don't open the box. I felt the call of the moors just like you did. But hey...." He gave his massive belly a two-handed pat. "I'm just too fat to go a-walkin' on the moors. I guess it was just Yorkshire luck."

MacCallister removed the ring from his finger and returned it to George, who in turn fetched up another box and placed it inside.

"Here's your whiskey, Mr. MacCallister. Have the bottle on me and drink away the night. Everything'll be all right come the morning, of that ye can be sure."

"The other thing is," the Yank said, "you must be a true Northman for the spell to stick." Then he raised his glass, as did everyone in the White Horse pub. "Welcome to Yorkshire, MacCallister. Cheers and long life."

MacCallister drank to the Yank's toast and then proposed one of his own. "Here's to Yorkshire luck," he said with a grin. "May there always be enough of it to go around."

"Hear, hear!" agreed all.

That night, the moon rose and set over a party at the White Horse pub. ❧

BOB LIDDIL has done technical writing for the computer and video software markets, and has published two fantasy adventure game books. He lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire.

SHIRLEY JOWISE lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Readers may remember her illustration for "Gremlin Gambits" in issue #5. She sold her first political cartoon when she was eight and peddled her own comic strips to her neighbors during her grade school years.

Artwork by Shirley Jowise

The Wizard's Brew

by Greg Hoover

"Drink this," the ancient wizard said in a voice which croaked like an old bullfrog. "It may make you immortal."

The young warrior gazed at the wizard through the reddish-orange glow that radiated from the crackling fire heating the cast-iron cauldron where the wizard cooked his curious brew.

"What's the matter?" asked the wizard. "Don't you want to be a god?"

The warrior lifted the heavy cup the wizard had given him to his lips, and as he did he felt the strange carvings on the sides of the cold, lead cup. He paused and looked into the eyes of the anxious wizard.

"Remember," said the wizard, "it may make you immortal."

The young man gripped the cup tightly in his strong hand and with one swift movement, he drank the bitter brew down.

Immediately the room began to spin wildly and the reddish orange light from the cauldron's fire began to grow brighter and brighter. In his hand the strange carvings on the side of the cup seemed to come alive and move inside his grasp until it felt as if he held not a cup in his hand, but a powerful, writhing snake.

The warrior fell to the floor with a heavy crash as the room began to grow dark.

"You said," gasped the young man, "that it may make me immortal."

With these last words, the light of this world dimmed completely from the warrior's eyes.

"Or it may kill you," said the aged wizard as he carried over a thick woolen blanket and covered the man from head to toe.

The wizard bent down and poked his severely wrinkled head and snow-white hair into the young man's cold face, and then quickly pulled the blanket over his eyes.

Just then the door to the wizard's cottage flung open with such a loud crash that the startled wizard grabbed his chest and let out a little cry.

At the door stood a hulking figure dressed all in black. The cold night air of early winter rushed in to meet the warm air of the wizard's cottage and created an eerie fog which surrounded the mysterious stranger's feet. When he breathed, the steam radiated from under his shiny-black helmet, and the smell of the evergreen forest rushed in with the cold winter to create a chilling effect.

"Who," the wizard faltered. "Who are you?"

The coal-black giant stood silently in the doorway for a moment, and then turned and firmly shut the massive door and worked the dead-bolt lock which made a quiet click.

"I am the Dark Knight, a mercenary from the Fallen Hills," said the huge figure in a low, almost unearthly whisper. "The Lords of the Seven Kingdoms have paid me handsomely for your head, but only if it's not attached to your body."

"Surely there must be some mistake," came the frightened voice of the wizard. "I am but a poor old man who makes his living tending sheep and farming."

"Please," said the Dark Knight. "Die with some dignity."

With this the knight gracefully moved his massive body across the room towards the old wizard.

"Please!" screamed the wizard. "I'll pay you more than the Seven Lords."

"No one can pay me more than the Seven Lords," said the knight with a quiet, cruel laugh. He drew his heavy sword from his black sheath and positioned it at an angle to his tall, lean body.

"Can I offer you nothing to spare my old life?" croaked the wizard.

"Only life eternal," said the Dark Knight.

An evil gleam came into the wizard's eyes as he bent down to grasp the lead cup at his feet. Quickly he filled it to the brim with the mysterious brew from his cauldron.

"Drink this," the ancient wizard said in a voice which croaked like an old bullfrog. "It may make you immortal."

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Greg Hoover is a free-lance writer of short stories, poetry, articles, and plays. Besides his interest in professional acting, his hobbies include fencing and chasing legends. He believes that a writer must make a conscious effort to live the elements of fiction and poetry which make his or her writing come alive.

Artwork by Brad Hamann

FRIENDS OF DARKOVER
P.O. Box 72
Berkeley, CA 94701

The Friends of Darkover is a non-profit, non-dues-paying, disjointed, un-mustered group representing the span from the golden season to the golden years, and from the golden mean to the gilded extreme. We calculate the membership, whenever we do, by using a complicated mathematical formula dividing the number of opinions expressed in MZB's mail by a percentage of the last postage hike....

Where to reach MZB: You can write to Mrs. Bradley c/o The Friends of Darkover — we generally show her any interesting letters in any case. You may or may not get a reply; it depends on how busy she is writing novels at the time. Letters written either to her or to the Friends are subject to publication in the newsletter unless you specify in your letter that you do not want it printed. All letters MUST be typed. Mrs. Bradley has had eye surgery and cannot read handwriting or dot-matrix printing.

Conventions: The Friend of Darkover no longer puts on the Fantasy Worlds Festival. The address for the Grand Council Meeting, held on the East Coast each November, is given below.

Publications: Several newsletters are published by Darkover fans, most notably The Darkover Newsletter. Others are listed below. Send them a SASE for more information.

The Darkover Newsletter is issued quarterly. The cost is $7.00 for a four-issue subscription ($10.00 in Canada, $17.00 foreign). Payment must be either a check in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank or a postal money order in U.S. dollars, payable to MZB Enterprises.

Back issues of *The Darkover Newsletter*: send SASE for availability and price.

Books: There is a Berkeley bookstore which carries MZB's books and will search for out-of-print ones, so you can write to them for anything you can't find locally. Whenever you write for information, please remember to enclose a SASE (Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope — and you thought envelopes didn't know how to write!).

Those Addresses:

GRAND COUNCIL MEETING
Armida Council
P.O. Box 8113
Silver Spring MD 20907

Council/Pen Pal List
Leisa Anne Clark
301 Belcher Rd. N.E., #253
Largo FL 34641

Moon Phases
Nina Boal
7818-E East Collingham Drive
Baltimore MD 21222

Bookstore:
THE OTHER CHANGE OF HOBBIT
2433 Channing Way
Berkeley CA 94704

Candles and Fireworks

by Helena "Jo" Karr

It was a melancholy day before Midsummer's Eve. The library was too quiet. The children, such frequent visitors during the winter months, were still revelling in their summer freedom from books and school.

The long, patronless day dragged on, but five o'clock came at last. Ms. Merriweather gave a last look around the neat empty room, locked the library door, and drove home. Ordinarily a jolly little woman, dubbed Ms. "Merry" by the children, that evening she found it hard to smile. She was lonely. Middle-aged and plump, with more than a few gray hairs scattered over her short, black mop, Molly Merriweather felt that life might just possibly be on its downward slide. Where was the adventure she had looked forward to as a young girl?

As she turned into her driveway, a squirrel – a little black squirrel – darted in front of the car. Ms. Merriweather braked sharply and stopped with a jolt. There was no sound from the squirrel, and she had not seen it clear the driveway. She opened the car door quickly and got out to kneel down.

The squirrel lay crumpled under the car. Carefully, she touched the little body, and it stirred slightly beneath her fingers. She looked closely for signs of blood, but the driveway was clean. Perhaps the little fellow was only stunned and if she left him there undisturbed, he would recover and run off.

She stood up and thought for a moment. If she moved the car, it might startle the squirrel into a sudden movement that might result in its death after all. Well, it was a clear evening, the car could remain in the driveway at least until after she had eaten.

From her kitchen window she could see the car and the small black shadow beneath it. She prepared a light supper, taking quick glances outside every few minutes. The small black shape never stirred.

At last, she sat down to a meal she did not have much appetite for. She ate quickly, then cleared the table and took the dishes to the sink. That time when she looked out, there was no little black shape under the car.

"Good!" she thought, "now I can put the car away."

She opened the door, then stood there looking down at the squirrel on her doorstep. It sat on its haunches, one foreleg lifted as if to knock, the other dangling in a strange twisted fashion.

Now Ms. Merriweather knew all the warnings about being careful with wild animals. She had often heard that a squirrel's bite could lead to rabies. She had also heard that a squirrel inside a house could wreak havoc. But she had injured the little creature and felt a responsibility to help it if she could.

As these thoughts ran through her mind, the squirrel remained quiet. Its large, shining brown eyes stared at the woman. Then, as she didn't move, it extended the uninjured paw and seemed to scrabble at the air.

That decided her. "Well, come on in, little guy," she said. "Let's see if we can do something about that paw." She stood aside and the squirrel used its three sound legs quite successfully to move into the cozy blue and white kitchen. Before long, Ms. Merriweather had fashioned a small splint and bandaged the squirrel's paw. It sat quietly all the while she worked.

When she had finished with the first aid, she studied the squirrel for a minute and said, "You must be hungry, but I'm all out of nuts." She stood up and opened the cupboard door. "Oh, yes, here's something I think you'll like. Peanut butter! If I spread it on a cracker and hold it for you, you ought to be able to nibble it."

When she held out the cracker, the squirrel sniffed it, then seized it between the sound paw and the bandaged one. The cracker disappeared quickly and the squirrel began licking the last vestiges of peanut butter from its paws, both bandaged and unbandaged. Then it looked up at the woman and made a short chittering sound. Ms. Merriweather laughed and spread a second cracker. After a third cracker, the squirrel dropped to all four paws and began sniffing all around the floor. The woman watched for a moment. Then, struck by the memory of how peanut butter can stick to the roof of anyone's mouth — and crackers make everyone thirsty — she filled a small bowl with water and set it before her little visitor. She sat down and watched him thirstily lapping.

Soon she began talking aloud, half to herself and half to the squirrel, "I wonder where you came from? Do you know, I believe you're the first *black* squirrel I've ever seen."

The squirrel stopped drinking and stared at her. It turned its head from one side to the other. She laughed, and the squirrel's tail flicked and curled up over its back. Then, as the woman continued to sit quietly, it began to groom its tail, using even the bandaged paw to fair advantage.

"Well, I must have done a good job with that splint if you can do as well as you have so far," she told it. "Still, I don't think you can manage tree climbing too well. You'd better stay here for the night at least."

This time the squirrel didn't bother to look up at her, just continued its grooming.

The squirrel spent that first night curled on a soft cloth at the bottom of a tall round packing case in Ms. Merriweather's basement. Its slumber was deep and quiet.

Ms. Merriweather's sleep in her upstairs bed was not that quiet. All night she dreamed of a black-haired stranger with dark brown eyes. His jacket and trousers were black. A shiny round medallion hung from the chain around his neck. There was some sort of marking on the medallion, but when she tried to examine it, the object blurred. The stranger's form also blurred and vanished.

The woman half-woke, then slept and dreamed again, this time of the little black squirrel in her basement. The bandaged paw was bare and well, and the squirrel was scrabbling at the sides of the packing case. She half opened her eyes and lay listening to the familiar sound of that oak tree branch rubbing over the roof tiles. Soon she slept again.

Just before morning, Ms. Merriweather dreamed that the young dream stranger stood beside her bed. She woke and sat up with a start. For a moment, she thought the dream was real and that someone did stand there. She rubbed her eyes and blinked. Then she realized that it was only the dark bulk of her

clothes draped over the chair at her bedside. It was much earlier than her usual time to get up, but she wanted to check on the injured squirrel. So she put on slippers and a light robe and went down to the basement.

The squirrel was awake when she peered over the top of the packing crate. It regarded her with bright eyes and began pawing the sides of the box. After a moment, it sat back on its haunches and began to scold. When the woman laughed, it stopped its chatter for a moment and then chittered faster and louder than before.

"Okay, okay! I get the message." She tipped the box onto the floor, expecting the squirrel to run out immediately. However, the box began to roll. Inside, the squirrel's tiny feet were running round and round. Before long, the box lodged against the basement stairs and the squirrel leaped out and up, jumping nimbly from step to step. Ms. Merriweather followed as quickly as she could, being careful not to trip over her robe or lose a slipper. She had no idea what the little wild animal would do once it reached the top of the stairs.

She found it in the kitchen, sitting in front of the cupboard that held the peanut butter jar and crackers. When she appeared, it turned to look at her, chittered once, and turned back toward the cupboard.

"Well, I must say, you know how to let a body know what you want," she told it, and opened the cupboard door. This time she spread three crackers, put them on a paper towel on the floor, and set a bowl of water beside them. She fully expected that there would be a messy floor to wipe up afterwards, but began preparing her own breakfast with no further attention to the little fellow.

As she drank her orange juice, ate her toast, and sipped her coffee, she thought about black squirrels. They were not indigenous to her area. Where had this one come from? Maybe he was just a drifter, a hobo looking for a handout. She grinned at the thought and conjured up the image of a squirrel roaming through the country with a knapsack slung over its back.

She glanced at the animal now and then, surprised at how neatly the little thing was eating and drinking. Not a speck of peanut butter, not a single cracker crumb, not even a drop of water marked her kitchen floor. The paper towel itself remained clean and dry.

The squirrel finished its breakfast before the woman finished hers. It began grooming its tail, then stopped, looked at the woman, and ran to the door. There it looked back at her, chittered, and pawed the door with its unbandaged paw. When she didn't get up immediately, it ran back to her and pawed at her robe.

"All right, all right, I understand!" She stood up. Before she had taken a step, the squirrel was back at the door. "Better not go too far," she cautioned before she opened the door.

The squirrel scampered off and disappeared. It did not seem to be at all hampered by the injured paw. All four feet were functioning with no sign of a limp.

The woman started to call, then shrugged and said to herself, "Without a name, how could I call it? Besides, it's not a pet, it's a wild animal."

She poured another cup of coffee and sat down to think. "Well, maybe it will be able to use its teeth to get the bandage off. I hope its paw heals all right." She finished the coffee and got up to do the dishes. She looked out at the sunshiny day and did some talking to herself. "Poor little guy. Wonder if he'll come back? Well, I'll just have to wait and see."

Artwork by Lisa Hunt

For several days, Ms. Merriweather worried about the squirrel. She had a name for it now, Drifter, and hoped to see it again. However, after more than a week, she gave up looking for it.

Then, on July third, the evening before her birthday, she was watching television. During a commercial, she looked over at the large picture window. There, perfectly motionless on the window ledge, sat a little black squirrel, staring fixedly at the flickering lights on the television screen. There was no sign of a bandage, however. It couldn't be Drifter, she told herself; but how strange to see a *second* black squirrel so soon after the first. She started to get up, and the squirrel turned its face toward her. Then it began to scratch at the window. Before Ms. Merriweather could get out of her chair, the squirrel jumped to the ground.

A minute later, there was a scrabbling and chittering at the kitchen door. When she opened the door, the squirrel darted inside and headed straight for the peanut butter cupboard. It sat up and raised its forepaws. It looked back at the woman and chittered.

"Then it *is* you!" She opened the cupboard and began spreading peanut butter on crackers. "Where did you go? And what happened to your bandage?"

The squirrel's bright eyes twinkled, but he waited quietly for his treat. He ate three crackers and drank his fill of water. Ms. Merriweather then expected him to return to the kitchen door and ask to be let out. Instead, he scampered into the living room and leaped to the arm of her favorite chair. He looked back at her, chittered, and patted the chair arm as if to cover up a buried acorn. Then he sat up, curled his tail around his body, and fixed his attention on the television.

Ms. Merriweather walked over and sat down in the same chair. The squirrel didn't move.

During the last commercial, Ms. Merriweather dozed off. When she awoke, Drifter was nowhere to be seen. She searched the house and called, but all was quiet. At last she was convinced that the whole incident had been a dream.

She made one last check before going to bed. In the sink she found a knife with traces of peanut butter on it. That night she dreamed again of the black-haired stranger. It was her birthday, and the thirty-nine candles made a dazzling blaze. He was smiling at her as she took a deep breath and blew and blew and blew until the last candle flickered and went out. In the blackness that followed, she lost sight of the stranger's face. She heard a rhythmic popping sound and thought he was clapping at the way she had succeeded in blowing out every last candle flame.

She opened her eyes to find the sun shining. What she had dreamed of as clapping turned out to be something plopping on the roof. The noises stopped, and she rose to look out the window at a lovely Fourth of July morning. A breeze was ruffling the leaves of the big old oak tree and there, peering through the leaves, eyes twinkling, was a little black squirrel. As she watched, he held up an acorn between his two front paws and bit into the shell. Quickly, he turned the acorn round and round, removing the shell bit by bit. Then he crunched the kernel, flicked his tail and vanished.

That was the last she was to see of him all day. She and two of her friends from high school days lunched together, spent the afternoon at the beach, and dined at the town's best restaurant. By the time she returned home, daylight was beginning to fade.

Before unlocking the door, she stood looking around the yard hoping for a glimpse of Drifter. Nothing. On an impulse, she walked over to the big old oak tree and gazed up into its branches. She even circled the tree, but there was neither sight nor sound of her little black friend. Disappointed, she turned back to the house and entered without a further backward look.

She changed into robe and slippers, poured herself a glass of wine, and sat down opposite the picture window. Every Fourth of July she sat in her darkened living room watching the fireworks brightening the distant sky. It was nearly dark enough for the display to begin. She sipped her wine and waited.

The first burst of light exploded high in the air and separated into hundreds of glittering, fish-like squiggles. That was just their test shot, she knew, and there would be a few brief moments before the show began in earnest. She lowered her eyes to gaze out over her lawn. Abruptly, she set down her wine glass and stood up. There was a small sparkling light out there on the ground that needed investigation.

When she stepped out into the warm, soft darkness, the light had already moved to the foot of the oak tree. As she watched, it rose rapidly up the trunk of the tree and shone through the leaves overhead. Ms. Merriweather crossed the lawn and stood beneath the tree gazing

Artwork by Lisa Hunt

up, one hand resting on the rough bark. There was a chittering sound and an instant later, a small paw touched her hand. There on the trunk, his eyes gleaming, was Drifter.

He chittered again and Ms. Merry found herself chittering back at him. A moment later, two small black squirrels were chasing each other up and around the old oak tree. the first one leaped to the branch overhanging the house. The second squirrel hesitated. Her companion looked back and made a soft coaxing sound. When she still didn't follow him, he returned to her side and chittered. Then he leaped again and, this time, she followed. What a delightful feeling to be sailing through the air! She landed beside Drifter, and he leaped to the roof. Quickly, she landed beside him, and the two scampered back and forth over the rooftop. From there, back to the tree and down to the lawn.

Soon they were racing over the fields, Drifter leading the way. He seemed to know where he was heading, and she was content to follow. Under her feet the ground was warm and her nose tingled with the grass scent. Once she paused and started to dig into the earth with quick sharp paws. Something was buried there.

Before she could uncover it, Drifter was back at her side chittering. She looked at him, gave a pat to the loose dirt, and ran beside him. They reached a small wooded area and were soon running through deep shadows. Then began a game of hide and seek, with Drifter hiding first and his companion seeking. Then it was her turn. There was no hesitation now when she had to leap from one tree branch to another.

As they played, the fireworks began in earnest. That stopped their antics and they rested high in the treetops, watching the bursting lights.

Then, as the night grew cooler, Drifter dropped from branch to branch and landed on the ground. He flirted his tail and turned to chitter at his friend to join him. She was already beside him, and the two started off at a mad dash back over the way they had come. She came to the spot where she had started to dig, but did not pause. Soon they were back at the oak tree, but neither squirrel sprang to its trunk. Instead, they frisked to the picture window and peered into the unlighted room. Then they moved silently to the kitchen door. Drifter lifted a paw to scrabble at the door and it swung inward at his touch.

He whisked inside and jumped up onto the arm of a chair. His companion scampered after him and leaped into the chair seat beside him.

The fireworks had reached their peak. Before the exploded parts of one had faded away, two more were bursting in air. Ms. Merriweather had never seen them more brilliant. She lifted her wine glass, and a soft voice near her said, "Have you enjoyed your birthday?"

There beside her, bending down, his brown eyes twinkling, stood the dream stranger. And she wasn't really surprised at first. She smiled and answered dreamily, "Oh yes, it's been a lovely, magical birthday." She thought for a moment before going on, "And I had dreaded this thirty-ninth year. Now..." Her voice died away, and she turned to the black-haired man, so shadowy in the dark room.

"But who *are* you? ... And how did you get here?"

He smiled and said, "Oh, I'm just a drifter. I thought you needed a little company tonight, but now the evening is over and I'll be moving on."

At that moment, there was a wild burst of lights and sounds from the skyrocketing fireworks, so bright and loud that they seemed to be inside the living room itself. Ms. Merriweather's eyes were dazzled by the flash that lit up the empty room around her. There was a soft click as the kitchen door swung shut. A small shape, only slightly darker than the shadowed lawn, streaked past the picture window and vanished.

She switched on the lamp and regarded her nearly empty wine glass. Wine had never before over-stimulated her imagination.

She looked around her neat living room. Everything seemed just as usual. "Well," she thought, "it *was* lovely even if it never happened."

She swallowed the last few drops in the wine glass and rose to take it to the kitchen. One slipper fell off and she glanced down at the carpet. There, right where her imaginary stranger had stood, lay a small, bright object. She stooped and picked it up. In her hand she held a small, shiny round medallion. And etched into its surface was the stylized outline of a squirrel.

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HELENA "JO" KARR tells us, "A native of Indiana and a retired English teacher, I was born shortly after the close of WWI of German immigrant parents. From my birth until my marriage, my home was in Terra Haute, Indiana.

"I was a WWII Navy wife, and my daughter was born at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California. Now, happily transplanted to Wisconsin, I have put down new roots.

"This is my first contract for a *paid* acceptance for a piece of my writing. The thrill it has given me runs a close second to that of our Golden Wedding Anniversary coming up this year."

LISA HUNT is married to another artist, Jonathan Hunt, and lives in New Hampshire. More artwork by Lisa graces our last story in this issue.

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks to Writers

One of these days I'm going to write a really good book... Sound familiar? Well, why aren't you doing it? Writers have all kinds of excuses for not writing — right now. Maybe you recognize some of these: "I can't write while the kids are so small." Surprise; my first books were written while I was pregnant with David, one of my best while I was pregnant with Patrick, many of the others while I had toddlers under foot. What's your excuse? "I ought to have a room of my own, as Virginia Woolf says in her essay 'A Room of One's Own'. If I had an office of my own, I'm sure I could write." Surprise; I wrote my first eighteen or twenty books without even a desk of my own; I wrote them on the corner of the kitchen table, which meant clearing it away every time I cooked a meal — and during those years I cooked three meals a day. What's your excuse? "I'd better wait till I'm through school." Guess what? I put myself through college writing confession stories and romances. I earned a teaching certificate writing them — and driving sixty miles to school three days a week and sixty miles back. I saw a lot of sunrises and sunsets — and stayed on the Dean's List. What's your excuse? "I can't afford to quit my day job." A young woman I know very well wrote her first two novels while working full time for the Department of Education. She also had two children during part of that time ... and was pregnant during the rest. (Her kids are just fine, thank you.) My English professor in college, who was also caring nights for an invalid parent, certainly had the best of all excuses for not writing. Instead she kept a clipboard in her classroom and wrote — during the ten minute interval while the classes were passing. She wrote several prize-winning short stories. What's your excuse? "I have to keep up on my social contacts ... there's a sale at the mall this weekend ... but we have to play bridge tonight ..." Yes, I've heard them all. People have as many excuses for not writing as there are would-be writers. The point I am making is that there's only one reason for not writing, and that's because you'd rather be doing something else. There is one circumstance under which no one can write; all your feeling for the book has simply deserted you and you have no idea what comes next; under these conditions, the task of writing a simple declarative sentence seems impossible. I get that way at least once in every book. This is when I wish I had chosen to be a plumber. But the book will come back; it always does. Meantime, bake a chocolate cake — balance your checkbook — catch up on writing those letters — go to the bookstore and look at all the new titles — sew yourself a new winter dress. Sooner or later inspiration will start burning again. At least it always has — so far. And if it doesn't — maybe you should have been a plumber after all.

While we're on the subject of life as a writer: Buy yourself a small notebook. Every time you do anything that's tax deductible, write it down. Keep the notebook in your handbag or in your pocket; write down every stamp on every envelope, gas (or bus fare) for every trip to the library. Every drink you buy for an editor at the convention (oh yes, entertainment of a legitimate kind is 80% deductible). Every time you get a sandwich in the college library. Every stamp or envelope you buy. Keep a record of it; you'll need it for taxes. A little casual bookkeeping is worth its weight in gold on April 15th. What's your excuse? I know a well-known writer — not me, in this case — who insists every time she starts a book that she's all washed up; too old to write; she'll never write anything any good any more. She has written at least six books under these conditions — and for all I know will write six more, though she's well over eighty. Your health? May I remind you that I've had three strokes and a heart attack; I'm still at it. Your age? Vera Nazarian wrote her first short story in high school; so did Bob Silverberg and Micole Sudberg. The creator of Nero Wolfe, Rex Stout, wrote his last book when he was over ninety; so did Agatha Christie and Manly Wade Wellman. The late Robert Heinlein wrote his last seven or eight best sellers after a major bypass operation. What's your excuse again?

Writers Talk Back

A Writer on Writing: The Basic Nuts and Bolts

by Mercedes Lackey

Have you ever heard of the Three Big Lies — "The check is in the mail", "The dog ate my homework", and "I'll respect you in the morning"? Well, here are the Three Big Truths — "You don't 'grow out' of acne", "They *can* print it if it's not true", and "There's no magic formula to make you a writer".

You become a writer by writing. A lot. Ray Bradbury has said that there are one million awful words in every writer, and you just have to keep writing until you get to the good ones.

You become published by sending things out. A lot. I *still* get rejection slips. I've gotten enough to paper my entire house by now. I don't know of any tricks that will make an editor go "Wow! That's Great!" except good writing. No amount of personal introductions are going to sell your book. Yes, there are a few books around that were sold because the editor owed somebody a favor — but if the book itself wasn't any good, the author never sold a second book. And believe me, the editor *does* read your work. But often he or she can tell that this author is not ready to be published within the first page; certainly within the first twenty. *That's his/her job.* It's *your* job to be good enough.

You can make an editor more inclined to think kindly of you by doing the following things:

(1) Your book manuscript should have a cover page with your name, address, and phone number, and the word count of the manuscript, in the upper right-hand corner. In the exact middle of the page should be the title. Beneath it, two blank lines and your name. Your story manuscript does not need a cover page, but it should have the same information in the upper right-hand corner. The title should start halfway down the page, with your name double-spaced underneath it.

(2) Number your pages. I also use a "header". At the top of every page I have the following information: "Lackey/Name of Work/P #". This is because editors keep manuscripts loose on shelves. Sometimes the shelves break...

(3) Do not bind your manuscript in any way whatsoever. This

will cause you to get a rejection letter immediately, because this is such common knowledge that editors figure anyone that doesn't know this can't be ready for professional markets yet.

(4) *Type* your manuscript on clean ordinary white bond (or print it on white fanfold). It must be double-spaced. DO NOT put it on green or pink or blue. This will not endear you or make your manuscript stand out as anything but the work of an amateur. Do not use both sides of the paper. Do not hope to save weight on postage and use onionskin. DO use a *NEW* ribbon. Do *NOT* use anything but letter-quality mode on a printer.

(5) Do not send five page cover letters. Don't say anything except, "I am so-and-so, this is a science fiction (fantasy) novel (or short story)." If you can say something else about the book in ONE SENTENCE then do so – for instance, "this is a coming-of-age novel about a young boy." Otherwise don't bother. The editor won't have time to read a five page letter and will figure that any book that needs a five page explanation isn't worth reading.

(6) DO NOT send illustrations. This will not make points either.

(7) You will not be read by the editor in the first place.* You will be read by a long-suffering soul called the "First Reader". It is his job to go through the pile of unsolicited manuscripts and try to find publishable books. The first thing he will throw out is any manuscript that is hard to read. The second thing he will throw out is anything that doesn't attract him with the very first page. After that he has a smaller pile. Now he will read the first twenty pages. He will throw out the *STAR WARS* clones, the Tolkien clones, the **THIEVE'S WORLD** clones, the D&D adventures written up as books. He will also throw out anything that doesn't hold his attention for those first twenty pages. Now he has a *much* smaller pile. He will take those manuscripts home, and read them as he gets around to them. If the book holds his attention (and remember, this is a busy guy who reads *all day long*), he will mark it for the attention of the Assistant Editor. The Assistant Editor — who is much pickier — will go through the same process. If it makes it past *him*, it goes to the Editor. This will take months, not the six to eight weeks they say it does. Publishers get a *lot* of books. If they've had your book for six months, it's fair to say that they might be interested.

(8) Nobody is going to "steal your idea", much less your book. First of all, you can't steal ideas; no two authors will do the same thing with the same idea. Secondly, nobody would even consider stealing a book; it's not worth it. A publisher could be wiped out by a single lawsuit.

**********Wee pause for an important announcement.**********

There is something called a "vanity press". Danger! They will take your money and leave you with a garage full of books (or tapes, they exist in the music business, too). Basically, you send your work to them, and they write back with incredible praise; this makes you feel wonderful. At the end of the letter, they will say, "But you are going to need some editing work, and since you're unpublished, we need $X for our time." Okay, you send them the money. Then, after several more sessions of this they say, "We're all ready to print this, but since you're unpublished, we'll need $XXXXXXX for printing and distribution costs." Well by now you've sent them so much money you figure you might as well... The books are never distributed; the "distribution" will be straight to your house, and they will tell you that it's your job to get bookstores to take them... and by the way, they're *very* interested in your next book – on the same basis. You've just spent $10,000 (or more) and you have a garage full of books no one wants.

What all that boils down to is: if a firm wants *your* money to publish your work, it's a vanity press. And they don't really want your *work*; what they want is your money.

**********End of important announcement**********

Sorry, everyone. No magic formula. No shortcuts. No Fairy Godmother. Just a lot of hard work.

*Except at this very magazine; Marion Zimmer Bradley reads all submissions herself. --*The Staff*

The Concoction

by Sandra C. Morrese

Lisa wrinkled her nose at the pot Marion stirred on the stove.

"You think it'll work?" she asked dubiously, "it smells awfully funny."

"We'll see," said Marion. "Do you have the rest of the ingredients?"

"Well, sort of. I couldn't find *everything*, so I kind of improvised."

"What's next?"

"Four super balls," Lisa said, "I could only find three, but I found a rubber dog bone?" Marion shrugged and Lisa plopped them in one at a time as Marion continued to stir.

"Three globs of silly putty," she continued. "You know that stuff's hard to find, it's so popular still. I think they've come out with a fluorescent kind now but figured you'd want regular."

"Good figuring. I don't think we need it to glow in the dark. Next?"

"One jar of rubber cement. It doesn't say what size so I got the biggest."

"Hmm. Put in half, I've been needing to pick up some for my desk."

"Five bottles black ink. They only had three. How about 2 rolls of black typewriter ribbon as a substitute?"

"Couldn't hurt."

"Simmer on low to medium heat 2 hours, let cool and it's ready to use," read Lisa.

They looked at each other and smiled showing crossed fingers.

When they returned to the pot the concoction was thick and sticky.

"Got the cartridges?" Marion asked.

"Right here."

They carefully poured the mixture into the four cartridges, holding them over a bucket in case any dripped. (Neither wanted to consider how long it might take to clean the floor if any goo spilled.) When they were finished they carried the cartridges to Marion's desk, slipping one into her machine.

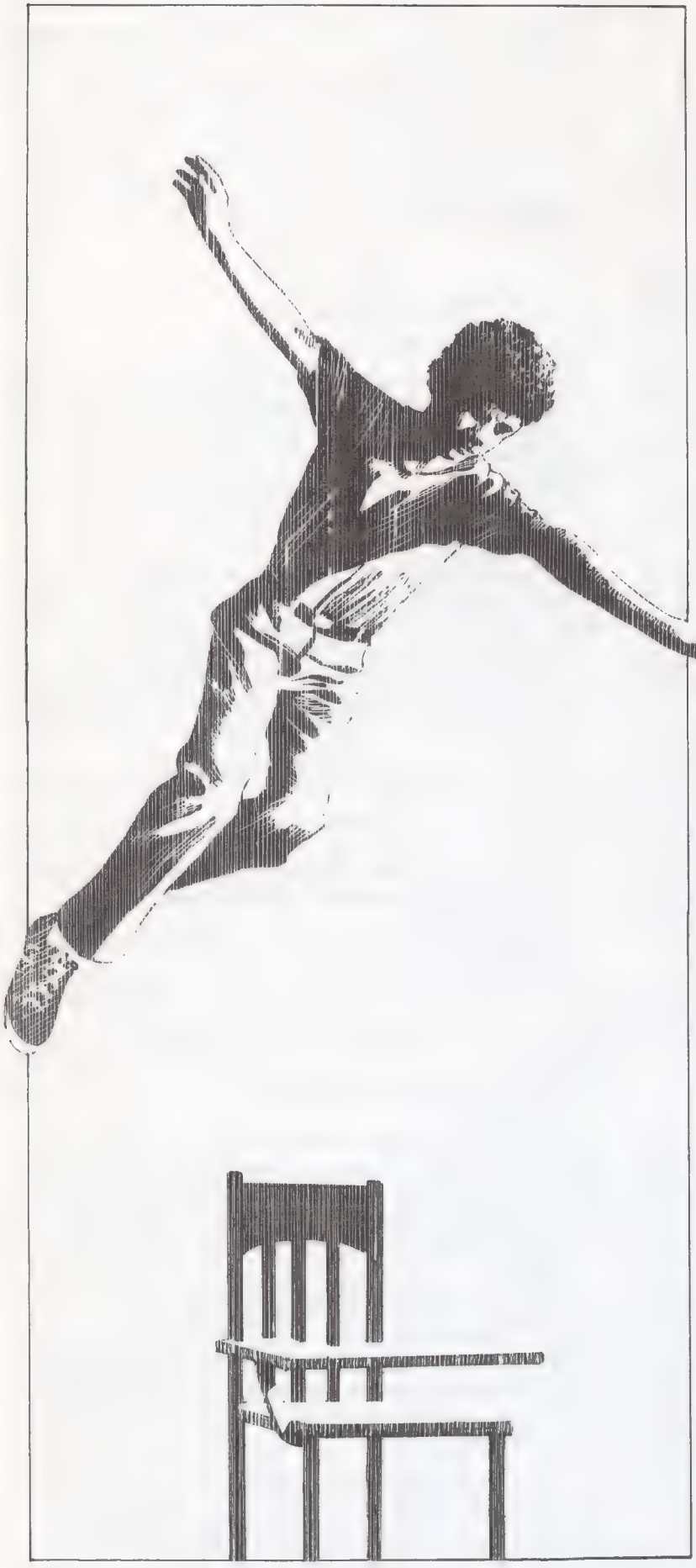
"Here goes."

"Well?" Lisa asked anxiously after an agonizing few minutes. Marion started to grin. Then she laughed out loud.

"Look! It's working! See how it stretches and scrunches to make room for more letters? Ha Ha! It works! Finally we can keep all the manuscripts we like. We have it! Elastic typeface!"

And with that the two proceeded to spring forward into a new era of publishing history.

Ed. note: Lisa (Elisabeth Waters) is Marion's secretary and not on the magazine staff. The Managing Editor's actually the one who worries about what will fit. We could use real small type but we figure you'd rather be able to read the stories.



Artwork by Vincent DiFate

Suggestion

by Barbara Rosen

Oh, God, what a dream! Beverly turned halfway over and stretched, letting her body subside into the nest of covers again. Whew. Talk about *vivid*! But of course, she thought reassuringly, things like that didn't happen. Not *really*. That was the thing about a dream: There was always the real world to stack it up against.

A good thing, too: If all of her kids began to do what Troy had done yesterday—

Beverly sat up. That was a *dream*, dammit! A very realistic *dream*.

Then why had Troy's mother—? She frowned. Had that been part of the dream too? No, she was sure Troy's mother had really been called to the school. But *why*? Because Troy had—no, that was the dream again.

Beverly shook her head and lay back slowly. This was ridiculous. Either she was losing her mind or—no, it couldn't be. It couldn't!

Okay. Take it slowly:

Today was Saturday. Yesterday was Friday. Friday was Experiment Day. Yesterday the experiment had been to try one of the motivational techniques from the teachers' writing workshop she'd been attending.

"How many of you," asked Miss Lewis, "have ever dreamed you could fly?"

Quite a few hands went up. Good.

"We all know people can't *really* fly," she continued. (They'd warned her at the workshop that you had to emphasize this when you worked with very little ones. Otherwise the next thing you knew they'd be flying out the windows at home, child bars or no, and the lawsuits could get nasty. Very nasty indeed. Well, and I *did* emphasize it, Beverly thought. It wasn't *my* fault!) "But today I'd like you to imagine that you *can*."

Tanisha's hand was up, waving wildly.

"What is it, Tanisha?"

"*I* can fly, Miss Lewis. Really!"

"Let's see you, then."

"Okay." Tanisha stood, closed her eyes and spread her arms wide. Everybody waited. In a few seconds she opened her eyes again.

"It isn't working now," she said, "but it did before."

"When was this?"

"In my house. My mother was there! You could ask my mother!"

Miss Lewis smiled. "Why don't *you* ask her, Tanisha? I bet she won't remember a thing about it."

"Yes she will. She was *there*."

"Not if it was a dream, she wasn't. Sometimes we have very real dreams, but when we wake up we find out that the people we think we shared them with weren't there at all. That's one way we can tell the difference."

"She'll remember," Tanisha stated positively.

"Ask her. Anyway, today *all* of us are going to pretend we can fly. Stand up." There was a great shuffling of feet and scraping of furniture. "Okay now: I want you to spread out your wings... That's it. Careful! Oh, Henry, can't you pay attention to what you're doing? That was Tiffany's *eye* you just hit!"

"I didn't see her."

"You're *supposed* to see her! Would everybody please look around and stand *away* from your neighbor? Thank you. All right," she began again, "spread out those wings...feel the air pushing you up...good! Take a deep breath...uh-huh... Fill up like one of those big balloons in the Thanksgiving Day parade."

Somebody giggled.

"What's funny?"

"Henry. He's Popeye."

"Hilarious. Does it still hurt, Tiffany?"

"Huh-uh."

"Good. Okay: we're all flying. Close your eyes if you want to...breathe way down...feel yourself get light..."

Miss Lewis looked around the room. There was Jason, brow wrinkled in concentration. Pudgy Andrina smiling like a chocolate seraph. Tatiana – God, what a beautiful child! – teetering on her toes with her eyes closed.

Miss Lewis smiled. Those workshop leaders had been right; the kids really got into it.

"Look around you. Where are you flying? Are you alone or is somebody with you?" She paused. "Now look at yourself. Is your body the same? Or have you turned into something that can fly? Are you a bird now? What kind of a bird? Are you a bat? A balloon? A kite?"

Miss Lewis stretched out her own arms and closed her eyes. "Feel the wind. Let it lift you up."

Somebody screamed.

Miss Lewis jerked open her eyes. Troy was staring into her face, his nose almost touching hers. His eyes were wide and fixed as if he were in a trance; in that one moment of total clarity she saw her own staring face reflected in his pupils. But how—?

The screaming was louder now, more voices. Words. "Troy! Lookit Troy!" "Troy's flying!" "Troy!" The sound of astonishment rapidly veering towards panic.

Miss Lewis reached out her arms, set her hands on Troy's shoulders and felt him press *up* against her palms.

"Troy," she said urgently; "Troy!" The wide brown eyes with their long fringes of curling lashes focussed briefly on her face and rolled back in their sockets like the eyes of a corpse. Miss Lewis was just in time to pluck him from the air as he fell.

"Rollins! Latisha! Go down to the office and get Mr. Williams! *Now! Move!*" She laid Troy down on one of the desks and felt under his jaw for a pulse. Thank God.

Troy had opened his eyes just as the principal came rushing into the room.

Beverly wiped her palms on the bedspread.

Good Lord! It had really happened, then. But *what* had happened? Mass hypnosis? Beverly had heard of isolated incidents of human levitation, but surely the explanation must lie in some error on the part of the witnesses. Hypnosis was the most convenient word for it.

Anyway, all she'd told the principal was that Troy had fainted. She wasn't trying to be deceptive, exactly; it wasn't as if she'd really understood what had happened herself.

One minute she'd been motivating her class for a writing lesson and the next Troy had passed out. Maybe the deep breathing had done it. Maybe the kid had simply hyperventilated and gotten dizzy.

But why had she opened her eyes to see his face on a level with her own? Had he climbed up on his chair? Beverly would have liked to think so, but that hadn't been what the others were saying. This had been no gloating tattletale voice, "Ooh! Troy's on his chair!" This had been a cry of alarm, *many* cries of alarm.

At least, Beverly thought, I wasn't the only one to hallucinate. If it *was* a hallucination. It's always some comfort not to lose your marbles alone.

She threw back the covers and sat up on the edge of the bed.

Of course, if it *hadn't* been a hallucination... If Troy had really...

"Ridiculous," Beverly muttered.

But—just what *had* the other children seen?

Troy didn't come in on Monday. Miss Lewis thought of calling his home on her lunch hour and dismissed the idea as an overreaction. The chances were that he'd just caught a cold.

Still, it would have been nice to see him sitting in his seat, copying his homework, playing with his pencil...just *being* there. Being Troy. Being normal.

Miss Lewis sighed.

"What is it, Tanisha?"

Tanisha sidled up to her desk, her eyes wide and sparkling.

"I asked my mother," she said.

"Asked her *what*?"

Tanisha stuck her thumb in her mouth. "*You* know," she said, "what you told me."

"I don't know what you're talking about. It might help if you'd get your thumb out of the way."

"The time I could fly," Tanisha mumbled around her thumb.

"Tanisha, will you *please* speak up?"

Tanisha smiled, took her thumb out of her mouth, and wrapped her hand wetly around Miss Lewis' arm.

"The time I could fly," she repeated distinctly. "My mommy doesn't remember, but *I* do. I flew up in the air. Just like Troy."

That would have been bad enough, but after all, thought Miss Lewis, I already knew, or at least suspected, that the other children saw Troy fly.

It was the principal's visit after lunch for which she was totally unprepared.

"May I see you outside for a moment?" he asked.

"Of course." Miss Lewis shot a warning glance at her class. "I'm going to speak to Mr. Williams. In the hall. What are *you* going to do?"

Latisha raised her hand. "Our work?"

"Your work." She turned to Mr. Williams, raising her eyebrows inquiringly.

He was frowning.

"It's about Troy," he said without preamble. Miss Lewis felt her heart stop.

"Is he—?"

"He's all right. It's his mother. She just called the school with the damnedest story." He hesitated as if he couldn't bring himself to repeat it.

"About his fainting spell?"

"Oh no, no; nothing like that. It's—His mother said—"

Miss Lewis had a sudden mad urge to tell him to take his thumb out of his mouth and get to the point. Mr. Williams shook his head and tried again.

"Last Friday, before Troy fainted...were you asking the children to imagine they could fly?"

"Why, yes," Miss Lewis answered, "it was one of the techniques from the teachers' writing workshop."

Mr. Williams nodded.

"Troy came home and – well, it seems he told his mother that before he fainted he was flying. Floating up in the air. Naturally his mother assumed he had dreamed the whole thing."

"Then, why—?"

"That's the easy part. I'm afraid the rest is—is rather incredible.

"The next night, Saturday, the mother reports that she put Troy to bed at the usual time and then sat up herself watching television until the news was over. She claims she was wide awake, hadn't dozed off in front of the set or anything like that. Anyway, when she got up to go to bed, she looked in on Troy and he wasn't where he was supposed to be. He—"

"Sleepwalking?" interrupted Miss Lewis.

"No. He—she *says* he was fast asleep in the middle of the room. Floating in the *air*.

"The woman swears she was awake," he concluded miserably. "She wanted me to find out just what you'd said to Troy."

Miss Lewis sagged against the wall. This cannot be happening, she thought; things like this do not happen.

"You didn't do anything wrong, of course," he continued, "but you—uh—you didn't notice anything—well, *unusual*, on Friday? Before the boy passed out, I mean?"

"I wasn't looking at him," said Miss Lewis shortly. "Excuse me." She poked her head into the classroom and there was a sudden hush as all activity ceased.

"Henry was throwing airplanes, Miss Lewis!" Patrina piped up.

Miss Lewis pointed. Henry grinned, slipped out of his seat to retrieve his airplane, and laid it in Miss Lewis' outstretched hand.

"Thank you." She dropped it into the garbage. "I shall be back in one minute. I'm sure all of you will be ready to have your papers checked by then." She looked around for evidence of rebellion, but every head was bent industriously over a desk.

She stepped back out to the hall. "I'd really better get back to them; they're starting to get wild."

Mr. Williams nodded. "Of course. I just wanted to let you know—"

"Yes, thank you; I appreciate it."

Troy came back the next day without his mother and without a note in his book to explain his absence. Evidently the woman had cooled off enough to entrust him into her keeping again, thought Miss Lewis; for her part, she'd be a lot happier if she knew what had really gone on here last Friday.

She glanced at Troy several times as she was taking attendance, but he looked the same as always, curly head bent close to his book as his small brown fingers grappled with the pencil.

Nothing untoward happened that day or the next. Miss Lewis was about to relegate Troy's levitation to the back closet of her mind where she was in the habit of keeping such disturbing phenomena as burning bushes, walking on water, and airplanes disappearing in the Bermuda Triangle.

But at lunchtime on Thursday, as she held her coffee cup with one hand while marking math papers with the other, something in the quality of the screaming in the school yard caught her attention. It was the sound of astonishment rapidly veering towards panic. Miss Lewis had heard it before.

She looked out the window.

There, in the schoolyard, in broad and innocent daylight, Troy was wheeling and swooping over the heads of a mob of hysterical children.

Miss Lewis was good in emergencies.

Without a moment's hesitation, she rushed into the yard and told Troy in no uncertain terms to get himself down and make it snappy.

Troy gave her a radiant smile and glided into her arms. As she caught him, she noticed that this time his eyes were bright with excitement, not dazed at all, and that he was sweating like any kid who'd been playing hard. She set him gently on his feet in the midst of the mob of jostling children.

"That was *fun*," he said, "just like Superman!"

I'll bet it was, thought Miss Lewis. "All right, now," she said aloud, "time to get on line."

By the time she'd gotten her class to take their customary size places, walk quietly through the halls, and put their coats away on table at a time, both Miss Lewis and the children had had a chance to recover a bit.

Then and only then did she permit any discussion of what had taken place in the yard.

"I think," said Miss Lewis after the first excited babble had died down, "that what all of us would like to know is how Troy *did* it." There was a hubbub of assent. Everybody looked at Troy. "Well?" said Miss Lewis, "how *did* you do it, Troy?"

"*I* don't know. I— you *told* us how, remember?"

"*Me*?"

"Uh-huh." His forehead wrinkled. "All that stuff about put up your arms and pretend you're a balloon and make yourself light... I just did it, that's all."

"You couldn't fly before? Before last Friday, I mean?"

"Huh-uh. I never even *dreamed* about it. But after you told us, I did."

Miss Lewis nodded. That must have been the night his mother found him floating around the bedroom.

"What made you decide to try it in the yard?"

Troy shrugged. "I didn't have anything to do."

"So you figured you'd fly around the yard a few times?"

"Huh-uh. I was thinking about my dream; I wanted to find out could I still do it."

"And you found out you could," Miss Lewis said drily. Several children giggled. "So what now? Does this mean you can do it any time you like?"

"I guess."

"Let's see you do it now."

"Okay."

Miss Lewis glanced up. "Careful of the lights."

"Okay," Troy said again. He stood, pushed in his chair and spread his arms. The room was absolutely still. Miss

Artwork by Vincent DiFate

Lewis saw him take one long, deep breath. Then he swayed forward onto his toes, smiled happily and lifted off the floor.

Miss Lewis realized that she had stopped breathing herself.

In that same unearthly silence Troy leveled off, cruised around the classroom a couple of times, and finally landed neatly on his feet on top of his desk.

"See?" he grinned.

The other children burst into applause.

Miss Lewis found that she was grinning too. "I'll be damned," she said.

Nobody even noticed that the teacher had said "damn".

Miss Lewis wondered what the other teachers were making of their children's stories about what had happened in the yard at lunchtime. Incredibly, no other adult had witnessed Troy's flight: either they'd been in their classrooms teaching or having lunch themselves. The few who'd been on lunch duty had apparently still been in the lunch room making sure the children emptied their trays, and no one had arrived on the scene until after Miss Lewis had gotten Troy down.

So *that's* all right, Miss Lewis thought. At least we're not going to be visited by reporters with camera crews. Not yet, anyway.

But of course you couldn't hide something like this indefinitely. Even if she warned Troy not to fly in public, there was no guarantee that he wouldn't forget. Besides, if he were to fly in his dreams again...

That night Beverly had a dream. She was so close to waking that she could feel the weight of her body pressing down on the bed, yet another part of her arose, lifted free and skimmed away, eyes wide open, over the empty nighttime streets of her own neighborhood. It was so easy, so natural, that she thought that if only she could remember the trick of it later she would be able to initiate her sleeping body into the mystery her spirit knew.

But of course it was no good. Her waking self, earthbound, knew better than even to try. She turned over, sank deeper into sleep. She dreamed she was climbing a tall, swaying tree, higher and higher until the branches dipped beneath her weight. There she clung, helpless to go up or come down, until the birds came home to roost and added their light selves, like drifts of leaves, to her overburdened branch. In a burst of screaming birds, the branch gave way and Beverly fell to the schoolyard where Troy was flying above the heads of a great crowd of screaming children. Kneeling there, smaller on her knees even than the children, Beverly watched helplessly as Troy ascended ever higher. The birds rose in waves and one by one the children also lifted their arms and flew.

Only Beverly was left alone, still kneeling as she gazed up to an empty sky.

This time she could not console herself with the thought that is had been only a dream. Perhaps *last* night's events had, but the essential thing, Troy's ability to fly (and my inability, Beverly thought) was only too real.

I wonder, Beverly thought, if he could teach me. After all, in the dream he taught the others. But he said *I'd* taught *him*.

She climbed slowly out of bed, stopping to knead the stiffness out of her neck. That purple tracery of veins on her thighs—had that always been there? Sighing, Beverly rose to her feet.

Just what had she told them to do, anyway? Spread out their arms... close their eyes... (Had Troy done that? Beverly asked herself. She didn't think so.) Now fill up with air, light, buoyant, like a balloon...Beverly teetered on her toetips as she'd seen Troy do, but her toes stayed stubbornly rooted to the rug.

It could only be that Troy really believed, Beverly thought. He believed because I am his teacher and he is a little child. "Except ye become as little children..." She shook her head. Now where had *that* come from? And what could it possibly have to do with *this*?

She shook her head again and let her arms drop to her sides.

Beverly had never felt old before. And dammit, I'm *not* old, she thought; it's just that the kids are so *young*. When she'd begun teaching, the parents who'd appeared on open school night had been her age or older; now even the *parents* looked like kids. And most of the kids she'd taught back then—fifteen years ago? Seventeen?—must in their turn be parents by now.

Fifteen years from now, where would she be? Still teaching? There had always been something comforting in the cyclic monotony of her job: the new little ones every fall, the classroom routines, the vacations at Christmas and Easter, the long break over the summer before it all began again. The children and the seasons renewed each year, yet, were essentially the same. Only the names and the faces changed.

And here am I, mused Beverly, a tree among the annuals. A little wider in the middle each year, putting out a new twig now and then, perhaps... somebody for the kids to come back and visit when they've moved on to junior high school: my old teacher, Miss Lewis.

And what's wrong with that, anyway? I love my work. I do it well. Why shouldn't I be the stationary presence in their lives, the rock around which these young waves roar?

Because everything is different now, she answered herself. Everything is different now because Troy can fly—and I can't.

If I could fly, Beverly thought, I could be the one to go before. That's what teaching was all about, wasn't it? To be always in advance of one's pupils, superior in one's knowledge, able to guide and direct?

But this! How could she be there for Troy, shelter him from the consequences of his power, if she couldn't—? No, it was impossible.

What a hell the poor child's life will be

once his secret gets out, she thought. The reporters would only be the beginning. He would be hounded and pressured for the rest of his days, even experimented on, perhaps. And it's all my fault.

Damn that writing workshop anyway! Damn those crazy people with their crazy ideas! "Motivate your class," they tell me. Yeah, sure! And now that Troy is motivated, just what am I supposed to do to *un*motivate him?

By Monday morning she thought she had the answer.

"Today," said Miss Lewis, "we're going to try something different." She let her eyes move over the children's faces, carefully avoiding the place where Troy sat.

"Last time we wrote I asked you to use your imaginations, to pretend you could fly." She saw several heads swing around to look at Troy. "Today — Henry, pay attention! — today I'm going to ask you to write about when you were a baby. Is there anybody here who can *remember* being a baby?" She looked around again. "I didn't think so. But we've all *seen* babies. Some of you may even have a little baby brother or sister at home." Several heads were nodding. "Okay: what are little babies like? Yes, Kyla."

"You have to give them their bottle."

"Uh-huh. Orin?"

"They cry all the time."

"Some do. What else?"

"They go, 'goo-goo, ga-ga'."

"Um-hm. Vernon?"

"They don't know how to use the toilet."

"Right. Now: were *you* like that when *you* were a baby?" Nods. "Was I?" Giggles. "Of course; we *all* were." Miss Lewis smiled.

"Now before I hand out your papers, I want you to think about being a baby. You can't walk, you can't talk; when you're hungry you cry and somebody brings you a bottle... Think about being so small that you can curl up in your mommy's arms and hardly take any room... She puts the baby bottle in your mouth and you suck on it and the milk is warm and it tastes good."

Tanisha, eyes closed, was raptly sucking her thumb.

"You're warm, you're safe...when you're sleepy, you sleep; your mommy dresses you and gives you your bath and changes your diapers because you're too little to do anything for yourself..."

Miss Lewis looked at Troy. His eyes were wide and blank, and his breathing was slow. As she watched, a trickle of saliva appeared at the corner of his mouth and ran down his chin.

"You're so little that you don't know any words yet; you can't even talk."

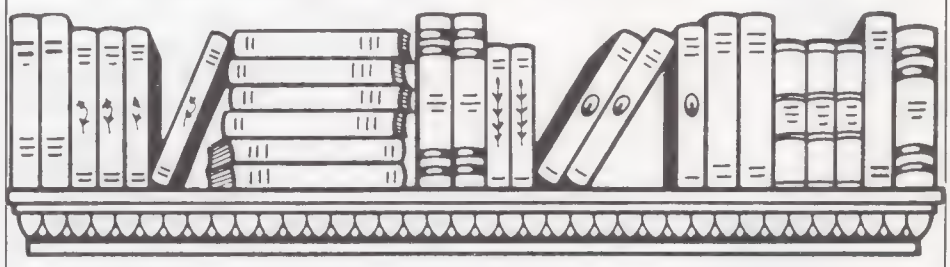
Troy slid bonelessly on to the floor. He smiled up at Miss Lewis, kicked his legs, and gurgled.

Miss Lewis knelt and lifted Troy's head to her lap.

"It's nice being a baby," she said. "It's so nice that you never want to grow up."

Barbara Rosen writes, "I am, as you can tell from my story, an ex-school teacher ('ex' because I came down with chronic fatigue syndrome a couple of years ago). I also run a shelter for abandoned animals in my home, sing in a fine choir, and paint professionally. I've been writing fiction for about five years."

Vincent DiFate won the Hugo as BestProfessional Artist in 1979. He is best known for his realistic spaceships, but he clearly is a master of the human figure (and heart) as well. He lives in New York state.



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Interview with Andre Norton

by Susan Shwartz

Even in the rough and ready equality and sibling rivalry that mark fantasy and science fiction writers, some people are special. Probably the one writer whose attendance at a science fiction convention is likeliest to inspire dedicated readers to scour their bank accounts and make a special trip to see her, is Andre Norton. And that kind of devotion is not just limited to her readers. It affects the writers, too.

I first noticed this at World Fantasy Convention, which was held in 1987 in Nashville, Tennessee. It featured two superstars: Piers Anthony and Andre Norton. Because I had edited the 1985 anthology in honor of Andre Norton, **MOONSINGER'S FRIENDS**, I was asked to interview her. We were sitting in the Green Room waiting to go on when I noticed something new and different. The room was filled with writers, mostly women writers such as Jayge Carr, Nancy Springer, Judith Tarr, and a variety of others. These people are friends and colleagues: when they want to go up and talk to someone, they do.

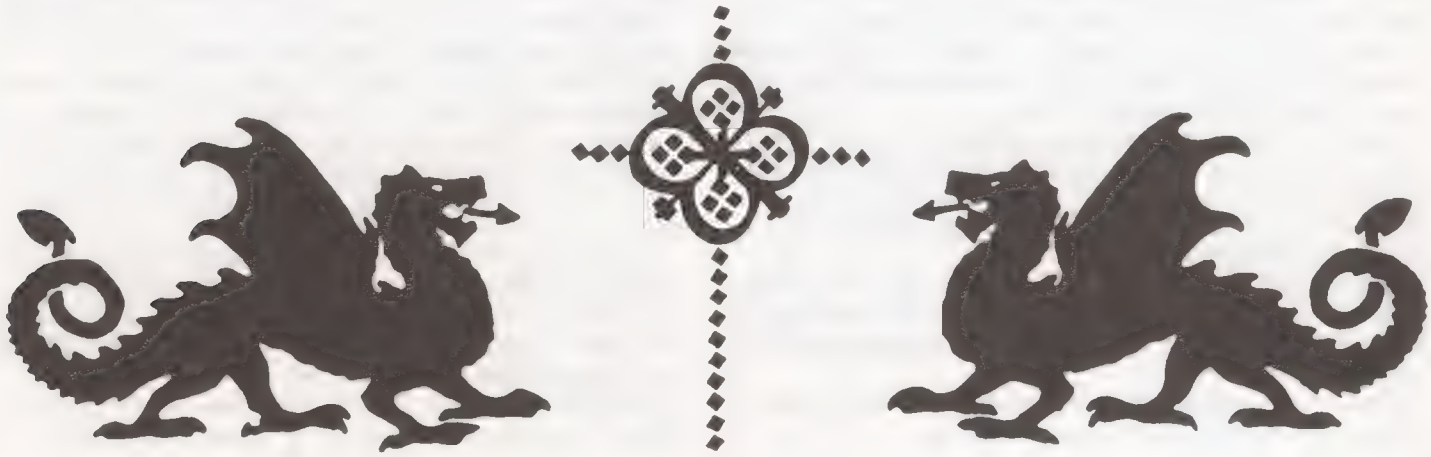
Not this time, though. They knew I was there to interview her, that I had done **MOONSINGER'S FRIENDS** and that we were collaborating on **IMPERIAL LADY**. They wanted to be presented to her — *formally*, one by one. Only then would they take their seats. Even then, they spoke only when they were spoken to.

Though Andre herself will deny it, she has earned special respect from women writers (though male colleagues remind us that they feel the same way). For many of us, she was not just the writer who introduced us to fantasy and science fiction, she was the role model who gave us the courage to try it. But then, her works have been the gateway for many readers who discover her and, under her careful sponsorship, are introduced to world after world of wonder.

Many of the people attending the 1989 World Science Fiction Convention, Noreascon 3, in Boston came to honor her and, probably, recapture a sense of themselves as kids, young readers for whom whole worlds were opening up.

Andre has spent her life creating worlds through her words. Andre redeems words and places. Take, for example, the word "lady". When I was in college, this was a word we were not supposed to use. It was elitist, snobbish, full of connotations of some frivolous, idle pet — as opposed to the strength and egalitarianism of the word "woman".

And yet I call Andre Norton a lady in the old and fine senses



of the word — gracious, refreshingly honest, eager to give of her best. In a time when many writers use their fiction as a platform to promote themselves or their theories, Andre is — another old-fashioned word — modest. She gives readers not herself-as-star, but her works, with no lectures or special pleading or fanfare. She does not seek to glorify herself and, though she holds strong opinions on subjects such as racial tolerance, the proper relationship of humanity and its machines, and kindness to animals, she does not preach. She is determinedly private — and readers create a very clear impression of her.

And the picture we get — of a lady who lives with her cats, who concerns herself with her work and her private charities, who is quiet, but stubborn in her ties to her family, her country, and her principles, who can flare with temper when her values are outraged, but laugh like a young girl — introduces us into yet another world. Though Andre herself lives in Florida now, her family settled generations ago in Ohio; when you meet her, you get the sense that you are meeting one of the leading citizens of one of Ray Bradbury's small towns.

It's a nice town, that village of the mind. No children run wild there or remain uncomforted; teenagers study and play and dream; and all the adults work hard. Cats sit on every porch — on good terms with the dogs who never bite. The streets are swept and well-lit, and you can go out at night and watch the wild creatures, who proceed on their own secret errands with no fear of humans and no need to fear them. Like Jorge Petronius, Andre Norton is a gatekeeper. Unlike him, though, she'll let you into her worlds and out again — taking with you the lessons you've learned from them. Like her own Miss Ruthvan, her craft opens people to wonders. Chief of those wonders may be the best that is in each of us.

She is a woman of few words, except in her writing. Recently, I was fortunate enough to catch some of those words and bring them to you. (A.C. Crispin has written two longer interviews with very strong bibliographic information, available in back issues of *Starlog*.)

Shwartz: How did you get started writing? Did you receive encouragement from parents, friends, coworkers, and editors early on? Do you think that it's harder, easier, or just different for a beginning writer now?

ANDRE NORTON: I received much encouragement from Mother and journalism teachers at school. I think it's harder for beginners now.

Shwartz: What are the values that you've drawn from your life and put into your fiction? (I'm thinking, of course, of your love of animals, your respect for cultural diversity, and your insistence on the importance of people over technology.)

ANDRE NORTON: I have never really tried to do more than tell a story, but IRON CAGE **was the result of my rage over stories I heard of animal abuse.**

Shwartz: You've written many different kinds of fiction. What caused you to make the transitions from the adventure fiction with which you began your career to science fiction, and from science fiction (such as the Solar Queen stories) to fantasy such as the Witch World stories?

ANDRE NORTON: For a long time, I wanted to write science fiction, but there was no market for book-length material, so I started with adventure. Fantasy appeals to me the most, personally.

Shwartz: If you had to pick one thing in your writing career that satisfied you the most, what would it be?

ANDRE NORTON: Probably my historical works, plus the Witch World material.

Shwartz: What books and writers have influenced you the most?

ANDRE NORTON: Talbot Mundy, A. Merritt, Rider Haggard, Dornford Yates, and B.M. Dix.

Shwartz: During a distinguished career as a solo novelist, you've also collaborated with many writers (myself included). Now, after the publication of **IMPERIAL LADY**, can you tell us something about collaborations in progress? (I'm thinking specifically of the ones with Ann Crispin, Robert Bloch, and Marion Zimmer Bradley and Julian May.) What do we have to look forward to? What do you find satisfying in collaborations?

ANDRE NORTON: I have recently collaborated with Robert Bloch on a Victorian murder mystery. I enjoy the Victorian period. I am also working with Marion Zimmer Bradley and Julian May on a long fantasy, BLACK TRILLIUM, **with A.C. Crispin on another Witch World novel, and with Mercedes Lackey on a fantasy.**

Shwartz: What prompted you to open the Witch World to other writers? In addition, what inspired you to open it to novel-length works by other writers?

ANDRE NORTON: So many people spoke to me of ideas which sounded fascinating, so I suggested they write them; also, I thought some of those ideas could be handled best in books.

Shwartz: Do you have additional plans for Witch World cooperations with other writers or additional products? (I mean Andre Norton Enterprises.)

ANDRE NORTON: There is one Witch World game out and a video game being worked on.

Shwartz: In the course of the past several years, you've been accorded two of the greatest honors that the science fiction community can bestow — you're the first woman named a SFWA Grand Master, and you were Guest of Honor at Noreascon 3. How did you feel about these things — and about your growing recognition both in and out of the field (i.e., the *Life Magazine* piece, *USA Today*'s upcoming segment, etc.)

ANDRE NORTON: I still find it surprising and often wonder if it is really my work they are discussing.

Shwartz: You have frequently said that you're a storyteller. People speak of your ethical work and your feminist work. Does it surprise you to be regarded as a writer with a "message"?

ANDRE NORTON: Yes, though sometimes I hope something in my work will lead a reader to further research.

Shwartz: If you were a beginning writer right now, what would you do? Would you do anything different if you were starting to write now than you did when you began? What would you recommend that beginning writers do?

ANDRE NORTON: The market setup has changed so much I cannot honestly say what I would do if I were starting out.

Shwartz: What do you think of how science fiction and fantasy fiction are developing? Are you pleased with the writers who are coming along — with the growth of established writers?

ANDRE NORTON: I am very pleased to discover new writers, and there are certainly many more of them now.

Shwartz: Many critics have written of how your vision has "darkened" in recent years with books like **BREED TO COME** and **DARK PIPER**. Do you agree?

ANDRE NORTON: I think our whole world has grown darker, and one cannot help being influenced by that.

Shwartz: At World Fantasy Convention and at Noreascon 3, it was remarkable how the women writers seemed to feel an especial kinship with you, and how the men writers respected this. Can you speak briefly of the work you've done to advance the status of women in the field?

ANDRE NORTON: I cannot think of anything I have consciously done to advance the cause of women writers except the Gryphon Award.

Shwartz: If we were preparing a list of ten writers known for getting on political bandwagons, it's likely that your name would be absent. Yet, as we've seen before, you've done a great deal for women writers, and your books frequently deal with issues of equality for people (and beings) of all races, as well as animals. Do you find that you get your message across more effectively without preaching?

ANDRE NORTON: I think so — though I have taken a stand against certain types of writing.

Shwartz: What first made you aware of the concerns of oppressed groups, including various races, disabled people, displaced people, women, and the helpless, including animals?

ANDRE NORTON: Reading.

Shwartz: Do you think that major historical events that you've seen — such as the Depression or World War II — have contributed to your writing?

ANDRE NORTON: Yes, in that these influenced very much the generations involved.

Shwartz: What do you think of the experimental, and often deliberately controversial, fiction of the New Wave, Cyberpunks, etc.?

ANDRE NORTON: I do not care for it — but then I come of a different generation.

Shwartz: What do you think of your reviewers, whether in newspapers and magazines or the more recently emerging academic notice?

ANDRE NORTON: Most of them have been fair — one or two have made mistakes which showed that he or she had not read the whole book.

Shwartz: Do you feel a responsibility to your readers of all ages?

ANDRE NORTON: Certainly. They deserve the best work I am able to deliver.

Shwartz: Thank you, Andre Norton.

❧

Editor's note: Since this interview was conducted, several of the collaborations mentioned here have been published. **THE JEKYLL LEGACY**, written with Robert Bloch, is out, and **BLACK TRILLIUM**, by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Julian May, and Andre Norton is available in hardcover. The paperback edition has just been released. **THE ELVENBANE**, with Mercedes Lackey, is scheduled by Tor for October. **WITCH WORLD: THE TURNING: STORMS OF VICTORY**, a novel written in collaboration with P.M. Griffin, appeared in March as a Tor hardcover. Andre Norton outlined and edited the book, which was written by P.M. Griffin. **CatFANTASTIC II**, co-edited with Martin H. Greenberg, also appeared this spring as an original DAW paperback with a cover by Braldt Bralds, the artist who did the cover for **THE MISTS OF AVALON.**

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Back to Basics

by Dorothy J. Heydt

It was mostly the fault of the weather — the whole thing would never have happened in the middle of a rainstorm. And perhaps Rhadamanthos had something to do with it too, simply from being a cat and being there. But mostly it was the hot, dry, static-ridden weather, that set the amulet working.

It was the amber pendant she'd picked up in England while researching **THE SWORD AND THE OAK**. Keighley found it in the carton labeled *S/O STUFF: DONE*, in the midst of an attempt to clean house. This she did as seldom as she could get away with it, but she had come to the final and inarguable end of her storage space, and something was going to have to go. Her long gray hair bundled into a coarse knot and her sleeves rolled up past the elbows, Keighley sat among the boxes like the conqueror among the corpses, performing a kind of triage on the physical husks of her memories; this to the closet, this to the storage shed, that to the dump. Like any kind of triage, it was hard on the nerves, and the weather made it no easier.

She found the pendant under the London street map and inside the big scallop shell she'd picked up in Cornwall, a flat oval of dark matte amber with something, maybe symbols, carven around its edge, and she put down the other things and sat down to remember it. She'd bought it in a junk shop in Chelsea and worn it hanging from a ribbon, for most of a week damp with rain, till she packed it up with the other stuff to be sent home ahead of her.

Pity she couldn't have brought the rainy week home with her too; they could use it about now. The region was in the third day of the santana that blew with desert heat and dryness out of the east, wilting lawns and aspirations, crisping leaves and tempers. It was hard on the people and even harder on the cats.

Rhadamanthos had given up his favorite niche, the sunny ledge above Keighley's desk. Instead he crouched on the glass coffee table, the coolest place he could find to lie on. Paws tucked in, tail neatly draped, he looked like a smooth lump of sandstone with ears. As she looked at him he opened his golden eyes and said *miarrr* softly in his whiskey-tenor voice.

"'Smatter, cat? Hot? Me too. Thirsty, I'll bet." She laid down the pendant and got up. They went into the kitchen. She topped off the cat's water bowl, but of course he preferred people food and they split a can of ginger ale.

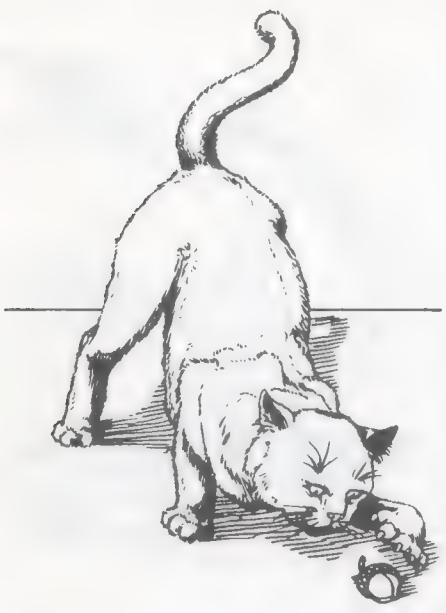
When they went back into the living room — a high-beamed hall that took up three-quarters of the house and served as office, library, and what-have-you — Rhadamanthos began nosing through the boxes. He batted an acorn across the floor until it vanished under the couch, and killed a silverfish that crawled out of an old copy of the *Sun*. Then he started in on the amber pendant, and Keighley took it back before it went the way of the acorn. She twisted its ribbon between her fingers and watched the pendant slowly rotate. Its dull smooth surface, like sand-scoured beach glass, spoke of long handling. The shapes carven into the edge were blurred and shallow now, some of them altogether wiped out. Too bad. The thing must be really old. Maybe she ought to get it photographed, or draw it. Here were two she could make out, one like three sides of a square and the next line like two sides of a triangle. Then nothing, a hopeless blur; then a T-shape and a circle and a squiggle, T O N. More blurs, and a shape like a Greek theta — it *was* a theta. The shapes were letters, Greek letters; she would have to get over to the University with this and let them look at it.

Rhadamanthos was under her elbow, forepaws on her knee, nosing at the pendant. "You read Greek, cat?" Rhadamanthos purred. "Do you really? Why do I find it hard to believe this?" Rhadamanthos continued to purr. "If it were Egyptian hieroglyphics, now, you might convince me. Watch it, cat. Your fur and this amber and this damned santana will generate static electricity, and if you don't —"

Too late. There was a faint sizzling noise. A spark flickered between the pendant and the cat's nose, and he yowled and lashed out, claws bared, and tore the ribbon from Keighley's hand and left a shallow track along her arm. Rhadamanthos vanished under the couch again.

The sizzling noise was getting louder. The santana must be getting worse. It sounded like static on the tube, or on the

Back to Basics



Artwork by Barb Armata

radio — but they were both turned off. Cripes! Had the static grown strong enough to foul up the electrical system? Clock, computer, coffeemaker —

A window must have blown open, or broken; there was a dust devil forming in the middle of the room. Picking up grains of dust and filaments of cat fur (the place did need sweeping badly), it swirled sand-colored in the air and drew into itself and took form.

It was a cat, and it was the same sandy golden-beige as Rhadamanthos. There the resemblance ended. This was a cat the size of a Great Dane, with massive forepaws and long forelegs that gave it a topheavy look; its slender hindquarters were crowned with not much more tail than a bobcat's. Its short-maned head turned from side to side; its tufted ears angled backward and forward to listen. Its pink nose sniffed the dry air, its golden eyes blinked, and the great mouth opened in a great feline yawn, exposing two long fangs like six-inch daggers.

Keighley did not faint. She merely thought it the better part of valor to lie flat on the floor, behind what meager cover the boxes could give her, and concentrate on breathing. From this position she could see Rhadamanthos huddled under the couch, the ribbon still tangled in his claws. Her heart pounded painfully loud in her chest and drummed in her ears. Her mouth had gone paper-dry.

"Pi, lambda, alpha, tau," she muttered, too softly (she hoped) for the great beast to hear her. "C'mere, cat. Greek. Plato. The Idols of the Cave. Oh, crap. Come *here*, Rhadamanthos." She wriggled on her belly behind the boxes, slithering over the polished hardwood, closer to the foot of the couch. "Mrowr? Archetypes. Goddammit. Here, kitty, kitty; catfood, catfood!" Which would be no more than the truth if the big cat took notice of them — so far, it was doing no more than stalking round the edges of the rug and snarling softly.

The Platonic Ideal of cathood (Rhadamanthos was edging closer, but he wouldn't come out from under the couch) — or what passed for it on this continent as least. (Keighley stretched out her arm as far as she could and groped the leg of the couch, six inches or so from Rhadamanthos's nose.) In Greece, with mistral blowing, the amulet might have called up the Nemean Lion. (She pulled steadily, trying to shorten her long torso like a crawling worm. She wasn't built for it. The couch creaked, and the sabertooth pricked up its ears.) Out of the mythic space in the mind of God or man, the amulet had generated the Cat Incarnate.

Thanks a lot, buddy. She couldn't imagine who would have invented such a thing or why, but she hoped he had to spend eternity cleaning out the Cat's archetypal catbox. She reached again, hooked her longest finger into a loop of the ribbon, and pulled. The amulet came away from Rhadamanthos's claws, and she dragged it out into the light.

The Cat turned toward her and roared, a sound like ripping canvas. Keighley couldn't hear her heart any more; perhaps it had stopped altogether. She got to her feet somehow and held the amulet over her head, as far from Rhadamanthos as possible. The Great Cat bunched its muscles to leap, and something like a little breeze came up and blew it back into dust and cat fur. Keighley sat down hard on the couch. The amulet dangled half-forgotten from her fingers. *I'm an old lady,* she told herself. *Middle-aged, anyway. They shouldn't do things like this to me.*

It must have been the static. Somebody had invented, or happened on, a spell that only worked inside a static charge. How do you get a static charge whenever you want it? Engrave the formula on a piece of amber; rub it when you want to use it. (Until somebody brought it to England. It had probably been centuries since the amulet had been activated.)

After a while Rhadamanthos crawled out from under the couch. There were dust-bunnies caught in his whiskers and his pride had suffered a daunting blow. Keighley only noticed him when he crawled into her lap and buried his nose in her armpit. Then she said, "Oh, no you don't. We don't want *that* again —" and threw the amulet across the room. It landed in the wastebasket.

But again she was too late. The little dust-devil was spinning in the wastebasket, lifting up scraps of paper and crushed milk cartons and dead rubber bands and the teacup she had broken last week. She got up from the couch, Rhadamanthos tucked firmly under one arm. It was between her and the front door. She couldn't go that way, but maybe if she moved quickly she could get into the kitchen before it took notice. She scuttled sidewise, crab-fashion, across the room. The wastebasket was putting out legs, and something like a head.

From the kitchen doorway she watched it take shape. It had found things in her wastebasket that she had never put there. It would have made a great editorial cartoon against toxic waste, a muddled three-dimensional collage of trash: McDonald's wrappers, plastic bottles, oily hoses, ominously bulging drums, dead fish. Its eyes glowed with sullen rainbows, like oil slicks. It stank. Its claws clutched around it on every side. It looked like Godzilla; like a Tyrannosaurus; like a dragon. Its toothed maw gaped. It was growing.

Rhadamanthos yowled in terror, and clawed his way out of her grip and vanished out the cat door. Keighley was past fear; her brain seemed to be moving at a glacier's pace; but at least it was moving, and presently it got her where it was going. She backed away toward the sink, keeping her eyes on the dragon shape in the living room. Groped for the cabinet handles; felt among the paper bags and Windex under the sink. A slick plastic bottle with a pump on its top. She grabbed it, glanced at it quickly to make sure; hauled it out.

The crumpled plastic spines on the dragon's head were brushing the ceiling beams. It had eaten all her "RECYCLE" and "FLEA MARKET" boxes, and was moving in on the old magazines. The wastebasket — with the amulet presumably still inside it — lay in the corner, half-hidden by the lashing tail. Keighley

loosened the pump top on the bottle, and threw it underhand. It skittered along the floor, under the tail, into the wastebasket, leaking iridescent petrochemical green.

Trumpets flared at the other end of the room. Drums rolled. Two young men in splendid tunics threw brilliant banners into the air, that somehow missed hitting the ceiling and fell back into their hands. There was the clatter of hooves, and a gallery full of spectators somewhere cheered.

He came like a flash of lightning out of the distant shadows—how had the room gotten so long and dim all of a sudden?—and Keighley knew him at once. ("It's all in my *mind*," she muttered. A good thing this hadn't happened to some youngster. She was old enough to remember the commercials that hadn't run for a decade, maybe two.) His silvery lance tilted to the attack, the snow-white plume atop his helm, his horse's mane tossing like sea-foam, the White Knight galloped into battle.

I'll never be able to tell anyone about this, she thought. *They'd think it was funny.* Not a bottle of detergent, but Incarnate Purity warred against Foulness in her living room. The dragon's flexible spine had twisted away from the first thrust of the lance; the second thrust shattered the lance against the hard scutes. The reptile had taken some damage; dark oily blood was trickling down its side; but it still looked ready to put up a fight. The white horse danced back a few yards; the Knight put up his visor to look over the situation.

Skin like cream, and the features of an Apollo she had seen in the British Museum. His eyes were the deep blue of the zenith at midsummer, and when he caught her eye and smiled she felt herself blushing like a teenager. "Courage, fair maiden," he said, and lowered his visor and drew his sword.

After that it all happened quickly. The shining sword swung round, once, like a windmill; and the dragon lay not headless but disintegrating, fallen into its component cans and bottles, plastic and paper scraps. They sizzled and writhed like salted snails, shriveled into nothing, and blew away with the dust. The Knight saluted her with a sweep of his sword; the white horse reared and turned away. He rode away, triumphant, into a flower-spangled emerald meadow that was somehow there, and the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

"Sorry, neither," she said. ("Hey, neat. I always wanted to say that.")

The windows sparkled. The floor had been swept clean; her trash recycled into the Great Perhaps without her having to tote it. A cool breeze was blowing in through the window; oh, blessed weather, the santana had finally broken. No more static. Just the same, she fished the amulet out of the wastebasket, rinsed off the detergent, and rubber-banded the thing firmly to the cold-water faucet over the sink, to ground it till she could decide what to do with it. She still couldn't guess at its original purpose: religious rites for Neo-Platonists, maybe, or inspiration for tale-telling bards. Archetypes: they were a writer's stock in trade, and she itched to put the amulet to use; but how could she do it safely? She had read her Charles Williams and knew what harm the Lion and the Eagle could do, let loose. It would be like powering her computer with a lightning bolt. Where was Doc Brown when she needed him?

Rhadamanthos, returning cautiously through the cat door once the noise seemed to have died down for good, found Keighley leafing through an old Edmund Scientific catalog, muttering incomprehensible human talk under her breath. "Electromagnets, electron microscopes, *electroscopes*."

As it turned out, what she wanted didn't come from a catalog, and she had to hire an undergraduate to build it for her. Your basic electroscope: static charge builds up on the sheets of gold leaf inside the glass globe, and then they fly apart. In this one, however, when the long golden leaves rose, they touched a pair of wires that led to a ground, and lost their charge and fell again.

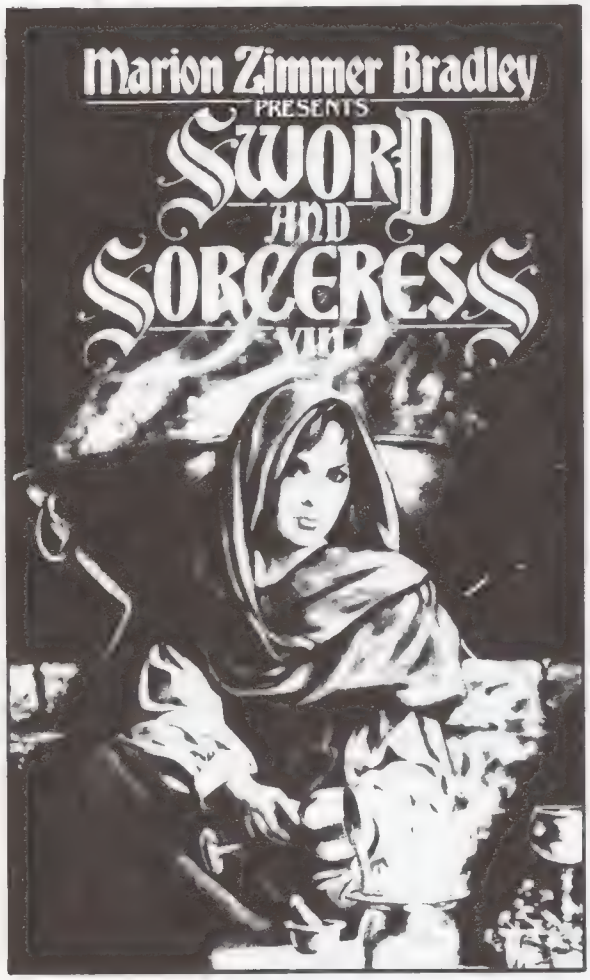
Since they had had to make it themselves, they had made it pleasant to look at: a swirling globe of Venetian glass, with a silver mount on top to hold the amulet and ebony feet to protect it from the ground. Charging and discharging, the gold leaves fluttered like wings all day on the sunny ledge beside Rhadamanthos's nose. And Keighley, her hands flickering over the keyboard, could almost hear the Eagle of Scholarship and the Dove of Creation hovering over her roof. ❧

Dorothy J. Heydt has one husband, two kids, three computers, four cats, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. By her own admission, she's a soprano, a Catholic, a Creative Anachronist, and a crummy housekeeper. She continues, "I've sold some stories to the Darkover and Swords and Sorceresses anthologies, and I've written a couple of novels which are currently languishing on some editor's desk somewhere. Watch this space."

Barb Armata lives on the East Coast and did the illustrations for two stories in this issue, this one and "Name-Price" by Catherine Faber.

Artwork by Barb Armata

Spells cast and swords crossed—the battle against evil goes on!



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Sunrise

by Leslie Ann Miller

Windy sat in the window and let the breeze run its icy fingers through her tangled mass of silver-white hair. The moonlit snow on the rooftops below shimmered the same color, and the icicles hanging from the attic roof glittered toothily in the light of the half moon.

It was fine for the snow and ice to shine that color, Windy thought. But not for hair. Hair should be black or brown or blonde or blazing red. Her mother's hair had been flaming red, as red as the maple leaves in the fall or a sunrise in the summer.

Her mother had been a hero, a Sword of the North. Aunt had once said that they still sang songs about her in the North, exalting her deeds and courage. She'd spent many years in the North fighting the monsters that threatened the villages during the icy winters.

Windy knew that she had been her mother's only shame. Her hair was silver-white, and she'd never been able to hold a sword. Her mother had desperately wanted her to learn how to fight, to follow in her footsteps, but Windy couldn't do it. The metal hurt her hands. All metal hurt to touch, even the cast iron pots, skillets, and cauldrons in the big kitchen below. Her mother had said she'd understood, that it was all right, but Windy had seen the pain in her eyes.

And her mother had left. Five years ago, she had galloped off to the North and left Windy with her aunt. She couldn't have known that Aunt would die six months later, but Windy couldn't suppress the bitterness she felt inside. Her mother hadn't taken her with her. Windy understood now that she hadn't been old enough. She hadn't been able to hold a sword. She hadn't been able to defend herself. She hadn't been born with red hair. She hadn't been a lot of things her mother had wanted and needed.

She clearly remembered the day her mother left. She remembered her mother telling her that she had to go, to fight for the land against an evil that was part of the darkness of winter in the North. She could still see her mother's deep green eyes as they looked into her own, begging her to understand, telling her what it was like to live in the North during the winter, telling her how the people despaired of ever seeing the sun again, telling her how freely the monsters roamed the the darkness, filling it with fear.

Her mother had described how every year, after the mountains turned to gold and red, the days would grow shorter and the sun would swing closer and closer to the southern horizon. Then, one evening, it would sink into the western sea and not rise above the eastern mountains the next morning. The only light in the sky was from the stars and the moon. The air turned bitter cold and the snows fell deeper and deeper, and never melted. The monsters came down from their mountain lairs to prowl the valleys. Only the vigilance of the Swords kept the people safe and prevented the destruction of the villages. It was a harsh and despairing time when the sun went away. It seemed to last an eternity. Then, after the moon had come and gone three times, when it seemed as if the sun had deserted the land forever, a dim glow would appear in the southeast, and the mountains would be silhouetted against the sky. The folk knew then that the sun would soon return, and they waited eagerly for the day when its burning fire appeared above the mountain tops to melt the ice and frighten the monsters back into their lairs. It was a day of celebration and joy in the North.

"My birthday," Windy whispered softly to herself, then pushed the thought aside. She hugged her knees tightly and felt the hollowness inside. She could see her mother mounting Black the morning she left. Her sword was strapped to her back, and her red hair tangled about its hilt. Black's saddle bags were loaded with supplies and winter furs, and her mother's chainmail shone in the morning light. She kissed Windy good-bye, told Aunt to take good care of her, and galloped down the small path away from Aunt's tiny cottage without looking back. Black's hooves echoed loudly on the gravel stones in the brisk morning air, and they echoed loudly in Windy's mind for five long years afterwards.

Windy's eyes drifted unwillingly to the northern sky, to the stars that formed the Great Sickle. She hated those stars. Here in the south, the sun never went away during winter. But she also knew, that on this day in the north, the sun

would break over the eastern mountains for the first time in three moons. Her birthday.

Every night for five years Windy had sat in this attic window to curse the Northern Sickle and feel the wind in her face. It had kept her sane, to have something to hate, and the wind blew fresh thoughts into her mind that the Home would have suffocated. With her mother she'd always been outdoors, but the orphans were rarely let outside the Home. Up here, at least, she could feel the breeze.

She loved the cold, and hated it. It tightened her body and made her feel alive, but she hated it because it came from the North. She couldn't have survived the dull, warm, oppressive routines of the day without it, but she hated it nevertheless. She thought her hatred was like the cold. It was icy, without warmth. Nothing could hurt her, not even the ice.

But tonight was the last night. In the morning when the sun rose, she would be free. After five years, she would finally turn of age. She would be free. She would no longer have to sit in the attic window to feel the breeze. She could walk away from the Home and never return, just like her mother had walked away from her. And, like her mother, she wouldn't look back.

She didn't know where she would go. She thought she might try to become a priestess for one of the temples in the South. Her aunt had left her a little money, enough to travel. And Windy wanted to get as far south as she could, far enough that she no longer had to look at the Northern Sickle in the night sky.

It was a comforting thought, to be able to leave the Sickle behind, and she smiled to herself in the darkness. She wasn't aware she had fallen asleep until she woke to find the Orphan Mother gently shaking her shoulder.

Windy looked up and was startled to see that the eastern sky was turning ghostly pale. She'd never spent the whole night in the attic before!

"Gracious, child," the Orphan Mother said, giving her a reproachful look. "How long have you been sitting here? You might have frozen to death! The whole attic is frosted over!"

"I'm sorry, Orphan Mother," Windy said, hanging her head. The Home could barely afford the coal it cost to heat the dormitories. Leaving the window open all night was terribly irresponsible, and she knew it.

The Orphan Mother should have

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

been furious with her, but instead, she smiled. "'Tis no matter, child. You must be eager to go, I understand that. Today is a special day, is it not? Come downstairs with me, and I'll give you those things that were left for you."

The Home was quiet with the children still asleep. The Orphan Mother led Windy down the stairs and into her small office. Windy had never been in the Orphan Mother's office before, and she looked around curiously as the Orphan Mother unlocked a cabinet and pulled out a large leather bag.

The Orphan Mother handed the bag to Windy. "Here is everything left to you after the auction of your aunt's cottage. There is quite a bit of money, and some jewelry, too. There are some papers from your aunt's estate, and an unopened letter addressed to you."

Windy nodded and looked at the bag in her hands. It was heavy, a pleasantly heavy weight that told her she would not want for food or shelter for a good long time. Slowly, she opened it and checked inside. There was a gleam of silver, and several papers. One was a letter with her name written clearly on the front. Curious, she took it out. It was still sealed by wax, and Windy recognized her mother's device on the seal.

With slightly shaking fingers she broke the seal, opened the fragile leaves, and read the words her mother had written so many years ago.

To Windyrian, my dearest daughter,

I asked your aunt to give this you this letter if I did not return after two years. Even as I write, I pray to the Goddess that you never have to read it. My greatest fear is that I will not be able to fill it with all the love I feel in my heart for you. Words have never come easily to me.

Windyrian, your father was a Huldre. He was tall, and fair, and handsome, and his hair was silver in the moonlight. He came to me one spring night, as I was sleeping in the forest, and when I saw him, I thought he was a dream. He was warm and tender, and in the morning when I awoke, he was gone. I have never spoken to you about him because I didn't even know his name. Even now, if it weren't for you lying asleep in your room, I'd think it all a dream. You have Huldre blood in you, Windyrian, and I never, ever want you to think that I loved you any less because of it. If anything, I love you all the more.

So, you cannot hold a sword. I've heard you crying, sometimes, when you thought I would not hear. I've wanted to tell you, always, that it did not matter; but I, who have faced countless enemies in the icy dark, was afraid to face my daughter's grief.

But what I couldn't say to your face, I can say to you in writing: it doesn't matter, Windy. You are who you are, and I love you! I have never once looked at you and wished to see red hair or freckles or a strong swordarm. You are my daughter, and your father's, too, and there is nothing, nothing that I would change in you!

I brought you to the south, my homeland, so that you might come to know it and love it as I have; but someday, I think, you should go North, if there is a North when you get this letter. You have Northern blood in you, my daughter, and I think you would be happy there. You should see the mountains in the snow. You should breathe the icy wind in winter, and walk in the moonlight in the dark green forests. The North is a land of magic, Windyrian, and you have magic in your blood.

The North is where I am going, Windy. There is a terrible evil there which threatens to take over. It is a darkness without starlight and moonlight, and a cold that abides no life. It is something that only I, and my friends, can fight. My skill is with a sword, and it is needed there, now.

It is not an easy choice for me, to go. I did not want to leave you. I do not want to leave you! But you are so young, my dearest, that I can't take you with me. You see, I can't bear the thought of losing you, and I go now into the greatest peril I have ever faced. Yet I have to go. If I do not, your homeland might be lost. I go to save your birthday, Windy, for if I do not, the sun may never rise again in the North.

I beg your forgiveness for leaving. Know that every moment I am away, I will be thinking of you. Every moment I will be hoping you are all right, wondering if you're getting along with Aunt, wondering if you are thinking of me. When I face the icy darkness, I will be thinking of you, and my love for you will keep me warm. The thought of you will keep my courage strong. More than ever before, I understand what we stand to lose if the darkness should win. Before, I fought for my own honor and glory. This time, I fight for you, so that you may have a future, and a world safe from the fear of horrors, blood and suffering. I fight so that the North will not lose the sun. I fight so that you might live to see the sunrise on your birthday.

I love you, Windy. They are words that do not come easily from a fighter's lips, and I know that you never heard them enough from me. I love you, Windy. I love you a thousand times over! Good-bye! Good-bye.

– Your Mother

Windy stared blindly out the window when she finished reading. There was a knot in her chest which she thought the wind had blown away years ago.

After a long silence, the Orphan Mother cleared her throat. "You are free to go, Windyrian," she said softly.

Windy swallowed and somehow managed to nod.

"Do you know what you will do? Do you know where you will go?" the Orphan Mother asked kindly.

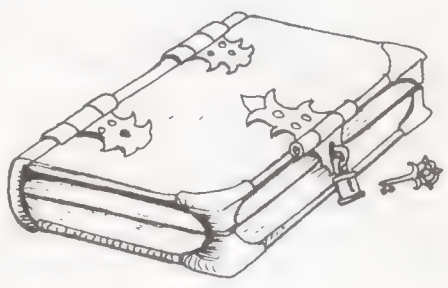
Windy stared out the window at the sun rising fiery red above the white rooftops. "I think," she said slowly with a slight catch in her throat, "that I will travel to the North. To see the sun rise."

❧

LESLIE ANN MILLER writes, "I was born and raised in Oklahoma. Through college and afterwards I worked as a Fire/Safety Inspector for the local university. I was also a volunteer Civil Defense 'storm spotter' which made life interesting during tornado season. When I finally got bored cleaning smoke detectors in the middle of the night, I moved to Berkeley to go to graduate school in Scandinavian Studies. I enjoy medieval history, bird watching, hiking, and dressing in black leather to beat on large men with sticks. That is to say, I'm a squire in the SCA."

Leslie has also worked at Locus Magazine and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine.*

ALAN GUTIERREZ lives in Sedona, Arizona, and was recently the Guest of Honor at Amigocon 6 in El Paso, Texas.



Keith Woodmansee

Letters

Praise for Jan Burke

Lynne Armstrong-Jones
London, Ontario, Canada

Dear Marion and Staff:

I couldn't let Jan Burke depart without wanting to say something about the fine contribution she made to the magazine. In our rushed and highly technological world, there is definitely something to be said for someone who will take the time from her busy schedule to really *talk* to someone; to offer encouragement and support. Jan did these things, and was an important factor in putting out a high-quality magazine.

Jan was *always* there to offer assistance whenever I phoned about obtaining more copies of issue #this or issue #that. No matter how busy she was, she *always* took the time to be much more than personable.

And I'll never forget how wonderful she was, keeping me informed during Marion's illness — even when it meant calling two different numbers spread over Southwestern Ontario.

Jan was a terrific example of how the SF and fantasy community is a *people*-oriented one.

Jan, I wish you all the best in your future endeavours. You're a true "people-person": Please don't ever lose that wonderful quality.

P.S. Oh yes, this is not to neglect greeting Rachel Holmen. Welcome!

I forwarded your letter to Jan. Thank you for the welcome, Lynne. I worked on issue #11, but this issue is the first that's really "mine". I especially hope you enjoy the illustrations — I have been dying for years to work with some of these artists, and now I have my chance. —reh

Familiarity Breeds Rejection...

The following is the sort of return postcard we frequently see submitted with manuscripts:

"TIGER, TIGER" reached us.

(Please circle one:)

(a) We liked it and are holding it for possible use.

(b) We hated it so much we threw the manuscript away. You look funny, too.

(c) The dragon got into the slush pile and ate your manuscript before we could read it. Please send another copy.

This cutesy-pie sort of thing makes me want to scream (or gag), because the first lesson a writer should learn is to be professional, not cute. Don't try to entertain the editor in letters and return postcards; put your talent and creative energy into your story! THEN, *when the editor knows you can deliver, you can try to sit in his/her lap. Think of your cover letter as your job interview. Would you stroll into a stranger's office for your interview, sit without being invited, and park your feet on the desk?*

Of course not! If you want to chat or be cute, write to the letter column. –MZB

What's In a Name?

Mary Anne Landers (Rima Saret)
Russellville, Arkansas

My fellow sf/fantasy writers, please consider well the names you coin for characters in your imaginary worlds.... On one extreme, we find stories in which the characters have names identical to given names in the real world — e.g. Magdalene, Juan, and Carlos in "Be It Ever So Humble". On the other extreme are monickers, mostly consisting of consonants, unpronounceable by the human vocal apparatus — e.g. Qllic, Gnizama, and Btan-Btan in "Rebirth".... For examples of what I feel are well-wrought imaginary-world names, distinct from those of our world yet appropriate and memorable, see "Brontharn"...Amberly, Galbor, and Gutwort.

In addition, I propose that we repeal a couple of unwritten laws in fantasy nomenclature: 1) bad guys must have cacophonous names; and 2) heroines should have names that end in the letter 'a'."

Your letter has glmtrilld my frinozrb, if you know what I mean. –Marionia Zmmr Brdly

It Hurts So Good...

Lyn Nichols
Mojave, California

This is not the first story I have sent to you, and I have to tell you of my surprise and delight when I received my last manuscript, "Apprentice", back from you (rejected). I have to admit, even your form letters are nicer than everyone else's. They still show you care about us. The delight came when I reviewed the manuscript. There were pencil marks here and there recommending changes and giving encouragement and advice. Thank you so much for taking the time to edit a story that you did not keep. I have made many of the recommended changes, and I do believe it is now a better story. "Apprentice" is already in the mail, on the way to another publisher. When it sells, I will owe much to your inability to be just another cold-hearted editor, for which I (and many others, I'm sure) am eternally grateful.

Inside the cold-hearted editor is a cold-hearted instructor! –MZB
And a warm hearted human-being.... –JAR

We Like Short-Shorts!

Cynthia Ward
Palo Alto, California

Another short-shorts issue, please!

Arrrgh! I'm glad you liked it, but I'll probably never have the time or energy to do it again! It's an unbelievable amount of work...but I'll keep scattering short-shorts among the other stories. I like them, too! –MZB

No Tense Like the Present

Katherine Grill
Champaign, Illinois

First let me say how much I enjoy *FANTASY Magazine*. I hope it continues for years and years and years.

Now to business. A couple of months ago I submitted a story for your review which you rejected because the story was written in present tense. First, please understand that I am not asking you to reconsider the story. My question is simply, why are you unilaterally against present tense in fiction? Or are you?...

ALL my rejections are just saying, "The story didn't grab me", and trying to articulate why. No story in present tense has EVER thrilled

me. Gustav Mahler once commented that he didn't like ANY of the works of Hugo Wolf. Somebody said, "Oh, come now; you haven't even heard them all." Mahler replied, Wolf wrote 450 songs. I have heard maybe 175. Those 175, I DO NOT LIKE!" 'Nuff said? –MZB

Music to Our Ears...

Laurence L. Toush
Muskegon, Michigan

Your magazine never ceases to give enjoyment. Just when you think the stories can't get better...another issue arrives!

The Cauldron is an enjoyable feature, too.... Who says only women can't make up their minds? I had no trouble picking number one but how about a four way tie for second? ... Keep up the good (great, fantastic, excellent, superb, magnificent) work!

We need 10,000 more like you! –MZB

If You Stand Under a Story Long Enough, It's Bound to Fall On You...

Markus Smithart
Pasadena, California

...maybe you would like to offer your views of the HOW of that magic when a writer suddenly happens upon a story. It's only happened to me once...but I can't figure out how...suddenly this seed just decided to sprout in my brain! There it was, a complete story.... I didn't work up character profiles, didn't labor over fifteen rewrites (only three), and didn't worry if it was "man against nature" or "man against man".... I just sat down and started banging keys. About six hours later, I looked up and there, coming off my printer, was a story!

Well, that's what writing is all about...when a story just won't leave you alone until you tell it! I don't know HOW it happens, either; but I certainly am glad it does. –MZB

Stoning the Romance

Karen Harbaugh
Auburn, Washington

Fortune smiled upon me the day I walked into a SF/Fanzine bookstore two weeks ago: I found MZB'S *FANTASY Magazine*....

The only unhappy note was Mercedes Lackey's "Satanic, Versus".... I have admired her writing for a long time...but the stereotypes of romance writers were unpleasant for me, to say the least....

I am a romance writer and also belong to a national romance writer's organization. I understand the story was supposed to be humorous.... I just object to having romance writers shown as either stupid or vain people who don't deserve high advances, or "over-imaginative middle-aged hausfraus"...

It's true that most of us are married and/or raising children, and thank God we have an imagination that lets us do that AND write AND not go out of our minds! Far from boasting about or even living on our advances, most of us have to get "real" jobs to support our families...most of us don't mention that we write at all, for fear we'll get the usual reaction of..."Why don't you write something worthwhile?"

I'm not denying there's junk in the romance field. There's some junk in other genres, too. That doesn't mean there aren't a lot of us working damn hard and learning to be good solid writers...(but) the putdowns come from Johnny Carson to the guy next door, every day. But hey, maybe I should be grateful. They make my rejection letters look like compliments, and that keeps me writing.

Let's just say, de gustibus. *I prefer horror. I stopped reading romances, or believing in them, a long time ago. Back then, though, I simply loved Grace Livingston Hill and Myrtle Reed. In fact, I can still see Myrtle Reed's influence in my books. Thank goodness there are still people out there who want to write GOOD romance novels, although I probably shall never read them. As the Scot said, "It's good that we don't all like the same things — think what a haggis shortage there'd be!" By all reports, a shortage of haggis is not imminent. –MZB*

Sweetness and Grimm

C. Shetler
North York, Ontario, Canada

Thank you for producing this wonderful (fairy tale) issue.... I completely agree with your comments about the Disney version of *THE LITTLE MERMAID*. I was so annoyed by their interpretation of this poignant tale as discussed in interviews with the stars of the film, and by reviews I read, that I refused to go see it.

In the meantime, I have accepted that I will die...I will hang on until I reach a surprisingly old age, and feel triumphant in the end for doing so. I have little doubt that you will do the same.

Your attitude is unusual in this society.... I'll see you at that Great Convention in the Sky! –MZB

Life's Horrible Enough...

Priscilla W. Armstrong
Baltimore, Maryland

Jan commented that there might be more horror fiction (in *MZBFM*) in the future; I hope not. There are many magazines available which specialize in horror, and others which have a sufficient supply. This is the only magazine which is truly for fantasy. I'd like to see it stay that way. There is more than enough horror surrounding us in real life so reading it is more than my spirit can take....

I print the best of what I get...including some horror; but note that I consistently reject gory, explicit horror no matter how "good" it is. I prefer stories about far away times and places; modern urban fantasy usually doesn't interest me. But I remember the words of one of my English professors whose parents trashed her for letting her students read "sordid" books like William Faulkner's. She replied that if the Lord had blessed her with children, they would inevitably learn about the sordid, one way or another. She preferred, she said, that they should encounter it first in a book.... –MZB

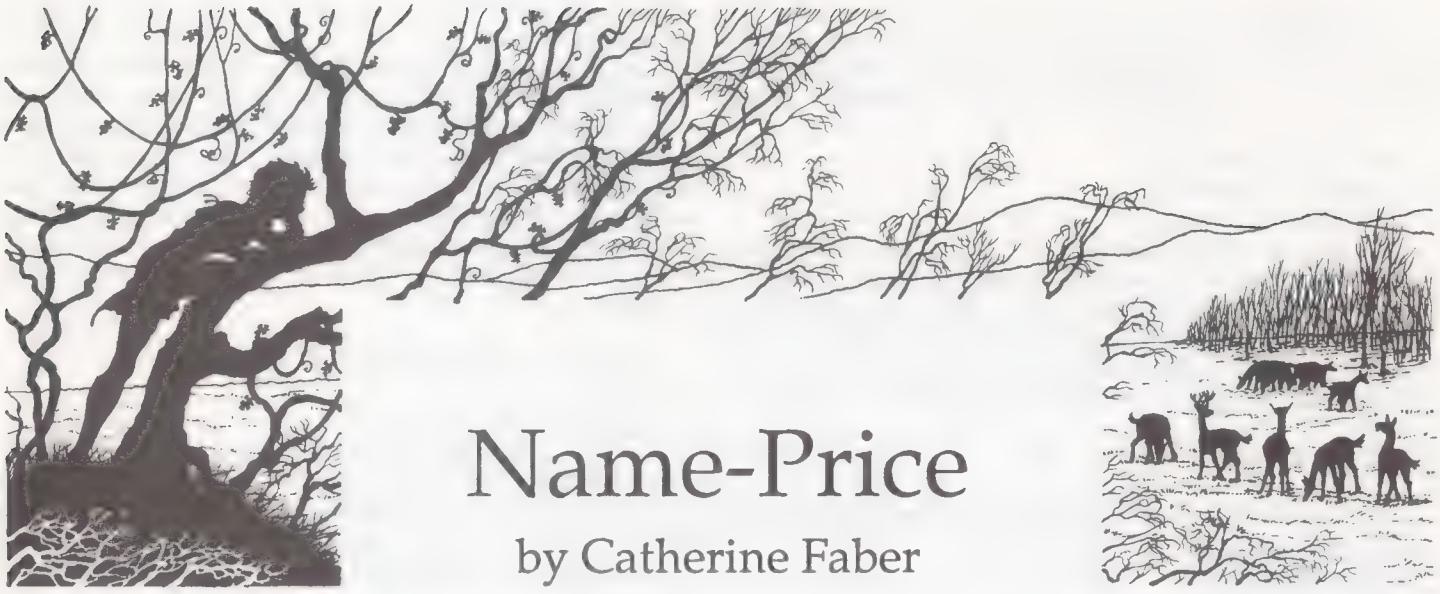
Illo Talk

Cherise Morris
Oakland, California

Thank you for a fulfilling magazine.... The "Sar Shan Kelpie" has taken residence in my imagination.... And the illustration! James Balkovek brings this story to life.... I happened to realize what a quick job these illustrators need to do. Story authors write at their own pace.

The illustrators must jump through the small window of time between selection of the story and printing of the story. I wonder...are your illustrators (on staff), or do several freelancers bid for each story? Does this change?

We commission a specific artist to work on each story requiring illustrations. Aspiring artists, send us a letter and samples of your work for consideration. We don't accept "cold" contributions. –MZB



Artwork by Barb Armata

Name-Price

by Catherine Faber

The girl who would be Wolf gazed out over the low rolling hills where prairie met forest, marking the herd of judithi that strayed into the folds of the woods, seeking the water they knew they would find under the trees. There were easier prey to stalk for the Kill, but none that would justify the ambitious name she had boasted she would win. If she came back to the clan with anything less, people would say she had chosen a name she could not live up to. Thunder had that problem, even yet. The girl would rather have died.

And die she might; the Kill winnowed out the weak of the clan who had made it through childhood. But that was as it should be, for it also winnowed out the weak or the foolish of the herds the clan followed. In the dance of living and dying that was the life of her people only the fit survived.

Tsaru (the name meant "pebble" in the tongue of her folk – the small ovoid pebble that sits well in the sling), brushed her newly shortened hair out of her eyes to squint at the scene below, thinking hard. She must make her Kill with no aid, no weapons save those she might fashion herself, without tools, from the stuff of the woods and the veldt. She was clad in the undyed garments of one who is of no clan, for since the child Tsaru had knelt in the circle to be shorn she had been dead to her family, and would remain so until the adult Wolf summoned the clan to share her Kill.

"When the Kill dies, the child dies," she remembered the shaman crying, and the response of the clan, made eerie, more powerful by the massed voices. "When the Kill dies, the adult is born."

She shook her head at her memories; more to the point, she had no knife, no spear, not even a belt to press into service as a weapon. A thrown stone would not do more than frighten a judith, and she was not strong enough to run one down and break its neck bare handed. Her fingers toyed idly with a strand of the white-blossomed chela, while she squinted under the sun and thought.

She watched the movements of the herd as she sat behind a little stand of brush that hid her from their view. The wind ruffled her hair again; she was downwind of them, as she should be. The chela grew thick here; the sweet scent would have been oppressive had it not been thinned by the restless air. Triumph-garlands were often woven of the stuff; her people had a saying, "seeking the chela before the foe", for those who were too impatient for honors not yet won.

Tsaru would be twining no garlands though; the stems of the vine were so tough that they could not be broken by hand, but must be cut with a knife. The which she did not have.

Would you get your mind on your business? she chided herself silently. *Why worry about not being able to break the chela when you haven't even made your Kill* – Her head jerked up as an idea surfaced; had she not been hidden the sudden motion would have scattered half the herd in instinctive flight. She turned new eyes on the vine under her hands.

If one strand of the chela was too strong for her to break, how strong would several strands be? If she plaited a rope of the stuff, to catch a judith's legs with, trip it – she had a fleeting vision of herself dropping a loop of rope over the judith's head, pulling it tight so that the creature could not breathe... Yes, that might work! Of course, gathering the chela would be a problem; lacking a knife, she would have to haggle it through with a sharp rock or something. She tugged at it thoughtfully, tried to score it with a thumbnail; it didn't work. Her nails were too short to get any real purchase anyway. With a sigh and a shrug she selected a portion of the vine and began matter-of-factly to chew it through.

Chela was not poisonous, but it was very bitter. She screwed up her face in distaste but kept at it. When she was done, she spat and spat again, quietly, and finished by wiping her chin. Then she took four strands of the vine and aligned their ragged ends; securing them with an overhand knot, she began to braid. A sudden thought took her, and she muffled a giggle; she really *was* seeking the chela before the foe! Before the prey, anyway. She wondered what the shaman was going to say about that.

The rope grew swiftly under her nimble hands; when she ran out of vines it was more than twice as long as she was tall. She coiled it up while she checked on the judithi again. Dust the color of her hair was warm under her callused feet as she carefully parted the branches. What she saw made her draw in her breath in silent jubilation.

Surely fortune smiled on her this day! The judithi had not entered the clearing before her, but she could see them pacing restlessly at the entrance. She knew that

they had been grazing on the prairie since dawn; their thirst, like her own, was growing. Now, in the singing summer stillness of noon, when the great predators were least active, they would seek water. Holding her breath, she watched them looking nervously about for danger. Still as a stone she sat, while the last breaths of the dying breeze ruffled her hair and the leaves of the brush about her.

She throttled back the elation that flooded her as they paced into the clearing, as if they might take fright from the force of it. The male turned his antlered head sharply, hearing something perhaps, and Tsaru tensed, but after a moment he came on, the two females following. Soon – the girl held her breath – soon they must enter the loose tangle of brush and small trees where she crouched, for the stream that they sought could be heard chuckling to itself behind her.

Closer, she thought, as though she could influence them, *oh come closer. One of you will buy my name....* She had thought to wait in a tree, to use her rope as a snare from above, but that would be impossible now. The noise she would make in climbing would surely fright the judithi past any hope of catching them. Not only that, but no other judith would enter the area while the fear-scent hung in the air. She would have to try another, more dangerous way.

When the brush had hidden them from her sight, she rose soundlessly to a half crouch, and began threading her way in their direction. She had been hunting since she was old enough to be trusted with a spear, and many were the lizards and hares that had escaped to teach her better stalking. She used all their lessons now. Biting her lip, she captured an alder branch, holding it out of the way so that she could pass without rustling it. She moved slowly, despite her urgency, both to watch where she set her feet, and to keep her breathing slow and silent. She listened to the mindless droning of the locusts, the sounds of the stream, hearing now and then the crackle of a hoof on sun-baked grass, the sound of a large body brushing softly past lowered branches. Carefully, smoothly, she flowed through the brush, after those sounds.

At length she drew near the stream. She heard the soft splashing as the judithi walked into the water, knew without looking, how they would drink, and pause, and bend again to the water, one always watching. She let them drink their fill, thankful that the air was now still so that her scent would not betray her.

At last, plump-bellied, their muzzles dripping, they splashed gently out of the stream, intent on returning to the grasslands. But to do so they would have to pass the predator who had concealed herself by the faint-worn track they had followed here.

The buck went first; knowing that his velvet-covered antlers were a weapon

Artwork by Barb Armata

she could not guard against, the girl let him pass. But as he was abreast of her, something, some inadvertent sound, a drift of her scent, some injudicious motion on the girl's part, warned him; he flung up his head in alarm and bounded away. Behind him the first of the does tried to do the same, but in following her mate she made a fatal mistake, for Tsaru was even then on the trail before her.

The second doe fled back toward the stream, in a great crashing of branches, and the first changed her mind and tried to follow, but Tsaru had flipped a loop of the improvised rope about her neck, and the jerk, as the doe surged against it, nearly knocked both of them off their feet.

Thrashing her head desperately, the judith tried to free herself, then lashed out, in unthinking panic. Tsaru dodged one striking hoof, but the second caught her on the thigh, and she cried out in shock, and almost fell. Blood welled up where the hoof had struck and began to run down her leg; her own movements sent bright drops spattering to the ground. Knowing herself in serious danger from the slashing hooves, she closed with the judith, clinging grimly to the rope as her prey's frantic efforts to get free yanked her about.

I will have my name, she thought with gritted teeth. *I will have it no matter what it costs; I will have it if I die for it.* Now close enough to the judith to look into its terrified eyes as its head came up, she pulled the rope tight, and tighter still.

And in that moment, under the force of her fear and her determination, something snapped. Something closed, or opened, some barrier lifted, and she *was* the judith, was not only a terrified girl determined to win her name and her adulthood, but also a terrified doe, determined to get away, to free herself of this clinging, strangling thing about her neck. For a moment she faltered under the force of it; the doe part of her sensed a slackening of the choking rope, and responded with a desperate leap for safety. In the next moment her hands tightened again, in instinctive response, and then in decision. The animal's leap knocked her off her feet and dragged her alongside, but she held on grimly.

The doe was weakening; when her plunge slackened the girl gained her feet again, bruised and battered, but not hurting, not yet, and twisted the rope tighter, feeling her throat close in sympathy with the doe's until her own breath whistled in her ears. She felt the judith's panic, her growing weakness, as poignantly as if it were her own, but did not relent; she had made her choice. She felt the fuzziness take over her sight and hearing, felt the growing darkness smothering her panicking mind, and knew to the moment when she finally died.

Then, and only then, did the tears start to rise, salt and stinging. Slowly, shakily, she rose from her knees, where the judith's collapse had dragged her, beginning to feel the hurts she had taken in the struggle. She knew, without knowing how she knew, that every adult in the clan had faced this choice, and chosen as she had, chosen to kill in the full knowledge of what they were doing. She had always known that the life of the clan came out of death; every dark moon they sang the songs of it again. Now she knew why some of the adults wept as they sang. Now she knew what it was that she was doing, when she killed.

Later, she would raise the ringing cry that the hills would throw back and back until the choirs of her namesakes could not have bettered it. Later, she would greet her kinsmen, show them the prey that had paid her name-price, give over the leather tunic she wore to be dyed with the swirling patterns of grey and green and brown that marked her clan. Later she would sit in the first ring of the Council, and share her Kill with every member of the clan, from the shaman to the baby Tinder had borne two moons ago. But not yet.

❧

Catherine Faber says, "I'm 27 years old, working toward my Ph.D. in Molecular Biology. About a year ago I moved to Amarillo, Texas, and I joined Queen's Own, the Mercedes Lackey fan club. I read that the 'zines associated with the club were looking for stories, and I said, 'I could do that.'

"Presently some of the 'zine editors asked me if I'd considered submitting to a professional market. 'Name-Price' was my first attempt, and my first sale. Between submitting 'Name-Price' and getting the acceptance letter back, I sent in two other pieces — and got rejection letters within the week. So I guess I'm batting about .333 right now...which isn't bad, for an amateur; the average will probably go down before it goes up again!

"I'm semi-active in the SCA. I also go to cons occasionally, where I can be found filking late into the night."

Barb Armata's business card says "Illustrations of the odd, the alien, and the everyday", and she lives in Adams, Massachusetts.

Artwork by Barb Armata

The Ever-Sounding Harp

by Rima Saret

Ages ago, when magic had power, and honor was not yet an empty term, Lord Aizot the Bold held a celebration to mark the betrothal of his daughter, Midori Sea-Eyes, to Prince Holmar, the younger son of their sovereign. The festivities were capped by a lavish banquet, at which entertainers of every sort performed.

Among them was Bremed, the most renowned itinerant bard of his day. He was still fairly young, with long raven's-wing hair, onyx-dark eyes, and a well-favored countenance. His slender form was clad in black leather.

Attractive though his looks were, even they could not compare in beauty to his singing voice, nor the playing of his yew-wood harp. It was as large an instrument as a wanderer could carry, strung with saffron-hued catgut. The pillar was most curiously wrought, for instead of a non-descript post it was carved in the form of a nude young woman. The dulcet tones from this harp caressed the ear in a manner distinct from that of any other instrument, and impossible to describe to one who has not heard them. It was famed among music-lovers as the Ever-Sounding Harp.

All the assembly were charmed by Bremed's music and poetry, but none more so than one certain listener. She sat at the high table between the six-year-old bride-to-be and her eight-year-old intended, who were not sophisticated enough to note the effect of the bard's performance on this lady.

She was Sedrayl, wife of Aizot and mother to Midori — a quiet, reserved woman. Now on the verge of her middle years, she had retained much of the youthful beauty that had passed on to her daughter. Both had blue-green eyes, pale complexions, and curly bronze-hued locks — though the mother's were concealed under a huge bun-shaped headdress. Her tall, slender form was arrayed in white silk with green and gold trimmings.

While Bremed played and sang, the sea-colored eyes of the lady of the castle were soft. Her dreamy gaze was fixed on the bard. He did not know it, but his harp was not all he played that night. Her heart responded to his songs just as his strings did to his fingers. When he sang of sadness, she cried. When he sang of joy, she knew real rapture.

She had precious little happiness otherwise. Aizot was not a cruel husband, but he was a negligent one. He had married her for the same reason he was now betrothing his only daughter: solely out of political expediency.

Aizot could be harsh toward his vassals, but so far the cautious Sedrayl had never given him cause to act that way toward her. However, she had come perilously close lately. She had protested his arranging this betrothal while Midori was so young. How could he know what kind of husband would be right for her when her character was still largely unformed?

Of course, he had paid no heed to Sedrayl's pleas, for his daughter's happiness was the least of his concerns. Sedrayl had to resign herself to his decision; she had been under a cloud of gloom ever since. Until tonight....

The bard strummed his last note. He made a respectful bow as the assembly clapped vigorously. The lord motioned for a servant to hand him a small purse. A pair of wrestlers came next. Sedrayl excused herself on the pretext that the wine was going to her head. Aizot was too engrossed in the match to notice.

She took a little-used corridor to a small window overlooking a chamber. There the entertainers waited their turn, then retired to this room afterward. Sedrayl looked for Bremed; she expected to see him resting, perhaps enjoying wine or counting his pay.

Instead, she found him asking a lute player, "Did you learn any new songs during your travels in the east?"

The lute player nodded, and played a lilting melody. No sooner had the last note sounded than the harper practiced it on his own instrument, and after a few tries got it down right.

Bremed asked others for any tunes they could teach him. Again he played them on his curiously wrought harp. Sedrayl marveled at his dedication to his art.

The following day, while the nobles were recovering from the feast and the servants were cleaning up its remains, she summoned Bremed and his harp to her sitting room.

He bowed to Sedrayl and her two com-

panions, then gave a performance no less polished than that which had so affected her the night before. She asked, "Master Bremed, why is a bard of your talents not already attached to a lord?"

"I've been offered such a position many times, and it would mean an easier life than that of traveling from castle to castle and town to town. But I have my reasons for living as I do."

"If they're not secret, would you tell us?"

He smiled, "For you I will. I tried to keep them to myself; but somehow they leaked out, and I'd rather you hear my story from me than anyone else.

"Five years ago, I wore the livery of Lord Revsim at his stronghold far to the west. I wasn't alone then as I am now, for I had both a partner and a wife. They were the same person, and her name was Tamaris. She composed and wrote lyrics for most of the numbers for which I'm known, and inspired me to create those for which I may ostensibly claim credit.

"Tamaris was as gentle and kind as she was gifted, and as beautiful... and that proved to be our curse. My lord desired her, and when she rejected his advances once too often he imprisoned her. I tried to free her and was locked up as well.

"However, in her cell there was a sorceress named Dardet. She had a daughter, also her apprentice, for whom Lord Revsim had lusted. Dardet cast a spell of impotence on him to protect her daughter; obviously it didn't last, but in retaliation he imprisoned the sorceress. She was creating another spell so that she could escape. Tamaris knew that Lord Revsim would shortly rape her, and implored Dardet for help. But for all her magic, she couldn't take Tamaris with her.

"Still, the sorceress did the next best thing. She turned the straw on the floor into a harp, then played a tune that transformed Tamaris into a yew-wood figurine. She installed it as the pillar."

Sedrayl gasped: "You mean..."

He strummed a few notes. "This harp is really my beloved."

She was too stunned to reply. Bremed went on: "I believed I'd lost her forever. I wanted to die; yet somehow I endured. A year later Lord Revsim got embroiled in a military adventure—a foolish one, for it cost him his life. The new lord of the stronghold freed its captives.

"I sought out the harp, and found it in a pawnshop. I had no money, but I obtained it from the owner by laboring for him for three months. I also sought out Dardet, and learned that she had passed away. Her daughter told me Tamaris could be restored to life if the tune that had transformed her were played on the harp.

"But the younger sorceress was tone-deaf. She couldn't tell which melody Dardet had used, only that it was a favorite of her mother's — a song she'd heard during her travels in her youth.

"Therefore I now roam the land, asking each musician and music lover I meet for tunes I haven't heard. I try each melody on my harp, in hopes that it will be the one that will recall my beloved to life. I never let my instrument remain silent if I can help it; hence it's known as the Ever-Sounding Harp."

Naimbay, one of the two companions, laughed. "Master Bremed, of all the stories you bards concoct for your audiences, this is one of the best!"

"It's not a concoction, but the truth. If I ever find the right tune, I'll prove it beyond doubt. Can you ladies teach me any melodies?"

Naimbay kept giggling and scoffing, but Sedrayl had quite a different reaction. She discreetly wiped a tear from her eye.

* * *

Sedrayl could think only of the handsome, melancholy bard. He filled her soul with his very existence, just as he filled the ears of his listeners with his music.

She had secretly fallen in love several times, before and after her marriage. Nothing had come of these infatuations, and they never lasted. However, she sensed that this was different.

For one thing, it was more painful. Bremed was in love with another woman, for whom he had suffered cruelly. He had dedicated his life to restoring hers. Outside of tales, Sedrayl had never heard of a lover so devoted.

With her influence, perhaps Sedrayl could help him... but if he succeeded, she would stand no chance of gaining his love. Not that such was likely in any case. Inviting Bremed to return her affection would place him in mortal danger.

Sedrayl had to keep her feelings secret. The laws of men and gods decreed she would never be able to have Bremed, but they could not stop her from loving him.

Sedrayl lay down to sleep, then saw the bard in her dream. She called out his name...and, unknown to her, did so with her real voice as well. Sedrayl spoke words of love in her sleep that she dared not while awake.

She roused Naimbay, who entered the room from her chamber in the same suite. She listened carefully as her lady poured out her soul to the phantom Bremed.

The next morning, Naimbay sought out Lord Aizot in his study. "My lord, I regret to inform you that your wife is in love with another man."

"Sedrayl in love? That's preposterous. It boggles the mind to think of that icicle-woman desiring anyone."

"I've noticed how she's been acting lately, as though she's in a dream. And in her real dreams, she cries out for her beloved. I heard her do so last night."

Aizot scratched his red beard. "And what might his name be?"

"I dread to say it, knowing the gravity of my charge."

He reached into a cabinet and handed her a purse. "Will this make you any bolder?"

She checked the contents, then said, "It's Bremed the Bard."

Bremed the Bard? How could Sedrayl or any woman love him? Who was Bremed but an effete artist with no deeds of valor to his name, no wealth or lands or titles? He was mild-mannered, modest, and deferential, without a trace of masterful virility — as far from the ideal of manliness as Aizot could imagine.

He dismissed Naimbay, then pondered her accusation. Aizot would need irrefutable proof before he could believe it.

Three days later, Sedrayl overheard her handmaids mention in passing that Bremed was preparing to continue his journey. She could not help hurting even worse than before. Odds were she would never see him again, though he would never leave the sanctuary of her heart.

Sedrayl resolved to speak with him once more. If nothing else were to come of her love, she deserved at least this final meeting.

She went alone, much against her wont, to the castle stable. There he was loading onto his wagon the Ever-Sounding Harp wrapped in sacking.

He looked at her in surprise. "My lady, this is an honor indeed, your sending me off in person."

"Master Bremed, must you go so soon?"

"I've learned all the songs your lord's musicians can teach me.

I've asked the same of your guests and servants and soldiers. Now I must get on with my journey."

Sedrayl thought quickly, then hit upon an idea. "I have much influence in this area, second only to my lord. If you let us appoint you our official bard, I'll send my servants to the farthest corners of the world to collect songs for you."

He looked her in the eye. "Why are you offering this, my lady?"

"Because I want you to stay. Because...." She was too overwrought to say more.

Bremed said gently, "You don't need to tell me. I know what you feel for me, and I'm flattered. But I gave my heart to Tamaris, and she still has it, even in her yew-wood form."

Sedrayl glanced at the straw-strewn ground. "Am I that easy to read?"

"For me, yes, but I've had practice. You're not the first woman who's become attracted to me in the course of my quest, but you're certainly the most lovable. Were it not for Tamaris...but I must be off."

She clasped his hand. "Even if we never meet again, I'll never forget you. You'll sing forever in my heart, and the devotion that draws you from me will also ennoble you in my estimation. Can you spare at least one kiss before you leave?"

He gazed at her tenderly. "I see no harm in it."

Bremed and Sedrayl kissed, then she quitted the stable in tears.

Neither saw a pair of eyes spying on them from a hayloft at the other end of the stable, too far away to hear clearly what they had said but close enough to get a good look. That observer was Aizot.

An hour later, Bremed was traveling through a densely tangled wood. The greenery ahead rustled slightly. He thought there must be a deer, but none bounded forth. He figured the leaves must conceal rabbits, squirrels, or such-like. Surely not robbers; they would not be so clumsy.

It was Aizot and four of his most trusted warriors. As the cart drew nearer, one whispered to his lord, "We can still call it off. It's a pity to kill someone so young and gifted."

"You have your orders."

"But you can't be sure that she's dishonored herself with him. All we know for certain is that they kissed."

"If there's a doubt, it's best to do the job anyhow. This way I'll know for sure he'll pay."

The four warriors sprang on the startled bard. He fell to the ground and struggled, but only briefly. One man pinned Bremed's arms behind his back while a comrade held a sword at his jugular.

Then Aizot emerged, and without further ado slashed Bremed's throat.

Aizot entered his lady's chambers, and found her weeping. He asked with false sympathy, "Why are you so sad, my dear?"

She thought rapidly. "I...I'm still upset over Midori. Oh Aizot, there's still time to reconsider."

He laughed, then motioned to an armed retainer. He brought forth a sack and upended it before Sedrayl. Out rolled the head of Bremed the Bard.

It took several heartbeats for the horror to sink in, but once it did she screamed. Aizot laughed: "See what happens to

Artwork by Richard Sardinha

your dream lovers in the real world!"

When she would not stop screaming, he slapped her senseless.

Aizot considered killing his wife but changed his mind. The vagrant bard had no family or friends to avenge him; executing Sedrayl would invite retribution from Aizot's powerful in-laws.

Sedrayl was brokenhearted but determined to survive. She kept the Ever-Sounding Harp and hid it from Aizot. Though she wished to continue Bremed's quest, she realized that such would be impossible. If a master harper free to travel anywhere could not discover the spell-breaking song, how could she?

Sedrayl never forgot Bremed, nor forgave her husband. From then on they had a marriage in name only.

Midori came of age; her marriage to Prince Holmar was just as miserable, though mercifully shorter. All it produced of any value was a son who grew up to be a well-respected leader. Sedrayl became a grandmother and later a great-grandmother.

One day, many years after Aizot had joined his ancestors, Sedrayl was alone with her best-loved great-grandchild, a precocious twelve-year-old also named Sedrayl. The dowager was showing the girl her treasures from days gone by.

Little Sedrayl rummaged through a closet and tried to drag out a heavy object wrapped in sacking. "Look, Gran-Gran, I've found a harp!"

Sedrayl's age-dimmed eyes grew misty. "And a famous one at that, the Ever-Sounding Harp. It's my most prized possession."

"Can you play it?"

"No, I was never talented in that direction, as you are — though I certainly loved music, and still do."

Little Sedrayl inspected the frame and tuning pins; the catgut had long since rotted away. "May I string it?"

Sedrayl smiled. "My dear, from now on you shall have the harp. I won't be around much longer; I want it to go to someone who'll cherish it as I have, and make use of it as I couldn't."

The Ever-Sounding Harp became the favorite of Little Sedrayl's many instruments. She often played it for her family and friends, to their delight.

One evening Sedrayl sat listening to her great-granddaughter charm her audience, which included several guests from afar. The maiden paused and asked, "Does anyone have a request?"

One guest said, "Play 'Where Has My Lover Gone?', please."

"I'm not familiar with that. Can you hum it for me?"

The guest complied, and Little Sedrayl began playing a lovely, poignant song. It was so soothing that the elder Sedrayl almost fell asleep in her chair.

But as soon as the last note sounded, she was roused by a great noise — like wood splitting, only louder than such was possible. Even with her cloudy vision, she saw the room suddenly fill with a golden glow.

It faded, and she heard a screaming voice her still-keen ears could not recognize. "Where am I? Who are you people?"

Sedrayl saw a blurry figure at her great-granddaughter's feet, then got up and walked closer. There, springing to a stance, was a comely — and nude — young woman with near-black hair. Someone threw a cloak over her. She looked around in fear; the rest of those present gasped and stared at her.

Then Sedrayl saw the Ever-Sounding Harp...or what was left of it. The sounding board, strings, and pins were in place, but the figurine that had formed the pillar was gone.

The stranger asked, "Will someone please help me? My name is Tamaris the Bard. The last thing I remember is being held prisoner in the dungeons of Lord Revsim."

Sedrayl was no less astounded than the rest, but she knew that only she could make sense of it. She told the young woman, "Lord Revsim is dead, and we're far from his stronghold. Nobody here will harm you, my dear."

"Who are you?"

"I am Lady Sedrayl. I know your story, Tamaris...wife of Bremed."

"Oh, where is he?"

"I'm sorry to say he's been dead for sixty years."

"Sixty years?"

"All your loved ones and friends have passed away, or will soon. The world you knew is no more."

Tamaris wept; Sedrayl embraced her. "But now you've been recalled to life. You must make the most of it, as your husband would have wished. Bremed searched the world for the song that would bring you back, and died in his quest. But be assured, my dear, that he loved you...until his last breath."

❧

RIMA SARET is a member of SFWA and lives in Russellville, Arkansas. She has published a lot of short fiction, has a B.A. and an M.A. in English, and lives with her grandmother and a calico cat named Sugar. Her sf/f favorites are, "in no particular order: writers – Thomas Burnett Swann, C.L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Clark Ashton Smith, Janet P. Reedman; artists – Rowena Morrill, George Barr, Virgil Finlay, Gray Morrow, Margaret Brundage, Laura Kagawa, Peggy Ransom. My favorite novel in any genre is H. Ridger Haggard's SHE."

RICHARD SARDINHA lives in Providence, Rhode Island. He sent us an original oil painting, unusual for magazine interior artwork, as his illustration for "The Ever-Sounding Harp".

The Dance

by Stephen Crane Davidson

"You will not be trained by the wizard. No lord would want a woman thus instructed, and as my first daughter, you will be married as I direct. Now go ready yourself for the dance." He stared down at her, his voice echoing off the stone walls of the cavernous room. The veins in his neck stood out, pulsing his anger.

Kalry felt tears welling into her eyes. She pushed a strand of long black hair behind her ear, took a deep breath to control herself, curtsied to her father, and turned to leave. She would not cry.

The room spun dizzily, and her ears abruptly filled with music. The sound found a place in her body. She whirled and spun, felt each note and the rhythm bind her, felt it speak to each muscle in her body. With ecstasy, she moved through the dance. The music became solemn. She felt the cloth slip back from her calves as she leaned to the side, lifting one leg high until her toes pointed to the flaring torches on the walls. Rising to tiptoe on the leg that supported her, she twisted from her waist and for a brief second felt the cool air touch the insides of her legs, her body weightless in the spin. Then back to the floor dancing, carried away by the music.

Finally as the last note fell, she stopped and bowed to her father. Her face flushed with pleasure. The guests clapped and her father stood beaming with joy at her performance.

She felt hot. Her eyes opened to see the sun shining down onto her face and the blankets that covered her. It had been a dream, though she was covered with sweat as if she had actually danced. Her breathing slowed. The blood drained from her face as her excitement fell to an aching hurt in her stomach. Tears welled in her eyes as she pulled her left leg over the side of the bed. Weak, thin, and cold from the plague of ten years back, she had no use of the limb. But she took a deep breath and started to pull the clothes from the bedside table. She would not cry.

It would be another day as any other. She would dress, eat, and then, using the walking sticks they had fashioned her, she would haul herself up the long stairway to the wizard's chamber. He refused to teach her anywhere else. She thought once again of the dance that she had never had, and feeling the tears coming too near, she banished the thought.

After all, the wizard had said she had great natural talent, and the magic had many uses. If she would never dance... perhaps someday she would fly. ❧

Stephen Crane Davidson has studied folklore and fantasy since 1972 when he completed an undergraduate thesis on Celtic folklore in Jungian psychoanalysis. He has worked as a counselor, in government public relations, and in education.

Janet Kramer comments about the illustration: "The young girl at the bottom is clearly unhappy. The bars of the cage almost impale her, and behind that is a shattered heart, because hearts don't live well in cages. Kalry, her father, and her teacher have built a cage in which none of them are free to be themselves."

Artwork by Janet Kramer

Artwork by Bob Eggleton

The Stone Unicorn

by John P. Buentello

Shaeton was browsing over a table strewn with bits of shaped and broken statuary when he saw the unicorn. He didn't actually see it at first. He felt the raw pulse of power the figurine emanated, and his eyes followed as if tugged along by some invisible thread. The unicorn lay half-buried beneath a pile of ersatz jade, and the mage felt his hands tremble as he lifted it free.

In the cloud-scattered sunlight of the merchant's stall, the figurine looked less than impressive. Hewn from a seemingly solid piece of sun-bleached stone, the animal's shape held none of the legendary beauty of the one-horned beast. If it had been a representation of an ordinary horse, it would have been a sorry one at that.

Shaeton did not care what the beast looked like as long as its horn was intact. His eyes traced the long spiral of silver growing from the center of its forehead, to the pin-sharp point at its end. Bringing his open hand toward that point filled the air between with ripples of power.

"Are you going to stand all day, sire? There are other stalls to visit, if you have no money to pay." The merchant was a sad-faced Easterner whose eyes had never left the mage from the moment the latter began browsing among his tables.

"What are you asking for this?" Shaeton's free hand went to his purse, feeling the lightness of it as it hung from his belt.

"Well now, sire," the merchant took the stone animal in his rough hands, hefting it like a ripe melon. "It's a big one. Made from fine stone, too." He squinted at his customer, trying to figure how much he could ask for the piece. "What say you to three rounds?"

Shaeton felt his jaw tighten and shook his head. Three rounds was enough to buy out the merchant's entire stall. He began to turn away. "Too much."

The merchant scowled, then stared at the figurine again. Shaeton was certain the other had no idea what he held, but it would never do to appear anxious. The fair in Boldge was a seller's market. As soon as a merchant smelled desire on a buyer the price would become outrageous.

"What say you then to a single round?" the merchant finally grumbled.

"A half-piece and a quarter," the mage replied.

"Done, sire!" The merchant smiled, exposing rotted teeth rimmed with gold. He held the figurine out with his left hand, the right open and awaiting payment. Shaeton willed his own hands to be steady as he accepted the stone unicorn.

Away from the shadows of the merchant's stall, the unicorn flashed silvered sunlight along the length of its horn. Shaeton stopped to examine the stone beast only for a moment. Already curious eyes were beginning to cast glances in his direction. He emptied the last few rounds from his belt pouch and placed the statue inside.

The main square of Boldge was overrun with wares from the merchants' stalls that lined both sides of the street. Shaeton stepped carefully between rows of spice jars and woven tapestries. An old crone called to him to buy her fortune dolls, leaning out to snake a thin hand around his arm. The mage stepped down an alleyway to his right, leaving the merchants to yell out their bargains to the emptying streets.

The back stoop of a shopkeeper's store proved to be isolated enough to give him the privacy he sought. Shaeton adjusted his robes and sat upon the cold steps. As he pulled the stone figurine free of its pouch the mage felt a shiver of power run from its horn down the length of his arm. He stopped for a moment, savoring the feel of new magic. It was something he'd not felt in several decades.

Whoever the mage or sorcerer was who'd enchanted the unicorn had been powerful. To turn even a normal animal to stone and then reduce its size would have taken a great deal of magic. In order to so enchant a magical beast like a unicorn would require the power of a master.

Shaeton set the figurine down on the cobbled street. He paced slowly around it, squinting and squatting to get a look at every angle. While he paced he let his mind wander over the lifetime of spells he knew more intimately than any woman's touch. Many of them were useless to him now, their power gone with the magic that had waned from his grasp over the years. It was a shame he'd grown so powerless of late. Only ten years ago, turning the unicorn back to its living state would have required only a fraction of his former power.

Now, he would have to settle for restoring the statue to its former size. The horn would be at least the length of a good-sized staff, with all of its power hopefully intact. He'd worry about removing it from the stone animal once he'd managed to get it back to its original size.

Shaeton stopped pacing when his inner voice told him the position was the proper one and that his mind had settled on the needed combination of spells. He closed

his eyes, not daring to watch while he worked. There was a good chance what little magic he had left would warp the intended spell. If that happened, he had no desire to see the result.

The air between Shaeton and the unicorn grew suddenly still, and the mage felt the first drawing of the magic within him. It was a feeling he'd never relished, likening it to someone drawing a metal wire down along the length of his spine. He concentrated on maintaining the spell, feeling his skin grow hot as spillover magic caused miniature sunbursts to appear about him. This was the most critical part of the spell. If he released his control on the magic flowing from him, he would be engulfed in a ball of fire that would sweep the alleyway clean.

A shrill whining sound filled his ears the moment the spell was completed, and Shaeton felt the breath pressed from his lungs by an unseen hand. He wavered for a moment, felt the sparse magic within him dampen and fade, before allowing himself to drop to the alley floor. When he was once more conscious of the world around him, the first thing he noticed was the strong and pleasant scent of spring flowers above him.

"Are you ill? Do you need aid?"

The words were a mere whisper in his mind, and it took him a moment to realize he wasn't actually hearing them. Shaeton pushed himself up on his elbows and opened his eyes. Staring into his were a pair of the greenest, softest eyes he'd ever seen. If they had been on a woman, Shaeton would have lost his heart to her in an instant. Being on a unicorn made them only slightly less compelling.

"Are you ill? Can you understand me?"

"Of course I can," Shaeton said, annoyed that the unicorn would even ask such a question. He might have been past his prime as a mage, but he could still mindspeak with a magical beast any time he felt the desire to do so.

The unicorn bowed its head, a cascade of snow-white hair falling from its mane to obscure those hypnotic eyes. "I am sorry, mage. I did not mean any insult. I was concerned."

Shaeton did not bother to reply. He was certain the animal could read any thought he dared to think. Instead he concentrated on lifting himself from the street. His frame, thin as it was, seemed to weigh too much for his arms to support.

"Here," the unicorn said, lowering its head toward the mage. The silver horn, now long as a rapier and exceedingly sharp, dipped in front of Shaeton's face. "Take hold."

Shaeton hesitated for a moment, then reached up and took the horn in his hand. The ripple of magic began again, stronger this time, much stronger than before. The mage felt the muscles in his entire arm jerk in response to the magic flowing into him. His body felt delightfully heavy, as though nestled within a soft blanket of down.

The unicorn gently pulled away from Shaeton, its silver hooves drawing sparks across the cobblestones. It shook its head twice, and as Shaeton watched the air the air exploded in firebursts as magic jumped from the tip of its horn.

"Sometimes I let too much power through the horn," the unicorn said, blinking its huge eyes. "I had to get rid of the residue. It doesn't sit well with most people if they hold my horn for too long a time."

Shaeton nodded and got to his feet, surprised at how good he felt. The weakness had left him completely. Even the twinge in his knees, which bothered him too often these days, was missing. "What happens when someone hangs on too long?"

The unicorn shook its head again as it approached him. "They tend to grow younger. Sometimes beyond my ability to control. I'd advise against experimenting with the process."

Shaeton watched the silver horn bob in the air before him. "Thank you for the assistance."

"Just returning the favor," the unicorn said. It regarded the mage with half-lidded eyes. "Why did you break my spell?"

Shaeton's own eyes widened in surprise. "Your spell? You mean you turned yourself into a statue of stone? Why?"

"It seemed to be my best option at the time," the unicorn replied. In answer to the mage's unspoken question, a name came into his mind. "Phylas."

"What was that?" Shaeton said, regaining his seat on the shop steps. "Is that your name?"

The unicorn nodded. "It's female, in case you're wondering."

"Isn't that a bit rare for a unicorn?"

Phylas seemed to smile. "Not really. We just keep a lower profile than our menfolk. You'd be surprised at the number of females that pass for males, anyway."

Phylas rubbed at his temples, still giddy from the lack of any pain in his body. That horn was a remarkable instrument. "You still haven't answered my question as to why you chose to become a statue."

"Self-preservation," Phylas explained, walking over to stand next to the mage. Shaeton noticed she glanced nervously toward the mouth of the alleyway. "There are many who would like to have use of my horn and its magic, minus my own involvement. One mage in particular seemed determined to have it. He wished to use its power as an instrument of war."

Shaeton understood, and with that understanding came a wave of guilt. The legends of the horn's power for healing or destruction were more than fable. Some of the mightiest rulers in the north wielded such horns in battle. Their ability to defeat any foe made them highly prized tools of magic. He himself had intended to make use of the horn to restore his own magic powers. Such an idea now seemed distasteful. To see those beautiful eyes closed forever would have been a disgusting tragedy.

"I'm happy you think so." The unicorn's words broke into his train of thought, and Shaeton felt himself blush in embarrassment. He was about to attempt to explain his reasons when he noticed Phylas had grown rigidly still. Her nostrils flared outward in sharp pants, and he could see the stain of sweat running down her neck.

"What's wrong? If you think I'd harm you—"

"Perlanton is here." The unicorn's words almost missed forming in his mind. Shaeton felt a cold chill of fear dig itself deep into his mind and realized it was not his own.

"Who is Perlanton?"

The unicorn snorted and started away from the mouth of the alley. Shaeton rose from the steps and followed quickly, barely able to keep up with the animal. His side was beginning to stitch when Phylas stopped suddenly before him, brought up by a dead end to the alley.

"Perlanton," Phylas said, turning to face him, " is the mage who wished my horn, and the end to my life when I would not freely give it. It was he I was hiding from. That's why I turned myself into a stone figurine. I thought he might lose the trail of something so small. Apparently I was wrong."

"Is that why you distorted your shape in stone?"

Phylas nodded. "I thought an ugly unicorn might draw less attention. I didn't count on a mage discovering me."

Shaeton felt the animal's fear like a torrent of magic. "Can't you simply defeat this mage? You are a unicorn."

Phylas shook her head and started back up the alley. "His magic is of a different sort. The kind not learned, but won and taken from others."

The blackest kind of all, Shaeton thought to himself. The kind I was ready to take from this beautiful creature. He followed the unicorn back past the shopkeeper's stoop up to the entrance of the alleyway. The unicorn had stopped there and was stretching her head back toward the avenue.

"He is here."

Shaeton peered around the edge of the alley wall. The merchants were even louder than before, hawking their wares to the lone figure who walked down the center of the street. The man was large and well-built, walking with a swagger that Shaeton remembered affecting in his younger days. The man's eyes, jet-black and piercing, swept across the square as he went. Each time he passed a stall he stopped for a moment, glancing through the tables of junk, ignoring the merchant's wails.

The unicorn drew back into the alley. Shaeton followed, already certain there was nothing the animal could do to save itself. Even from this distance he'd felt the angry power of the magic in that one. It would have been an awful thing for him to face even in his younger years. Now, with the gentle strength of the unicorn, they stood no chance at all.

"You must leave now," Phylas told him, backing slowly into the alley. "This will not be a safe place in a moment."

"You can't stay and face him," Shaeton said, suddenly angry with himself. The unicorn was going to die , and it would be partly due to his own greed. "You have to run. Hide yourself again."

Phylas shook her head slowly. "He will not lose me now. He'd destroy this entire village to find where I was hidden." She struck her hoof against the stone floor, throwing sparks of fire. "Don't worry, Shaeton. He will not have my horn."

"Or your life," Shaeton heard himself say. He stepped toward the animal, lost again for a moment in those huge eyes, and stroked its snowy mane. "There may be another way to do this, if you will trust me."

Phylas stared deeply at the mage, and Shaeton was certain she was not reading his mind. Trust, then, came in a form other than thought. "What do you wish me to do?"

Shaeton felt his entire frame shake from the effort of concentration. He grasped the belt pouch tightly in his hands, not daring to look up toward the mouth of the alley. He knew the moment Perlanton stepped into the alley. A wave of new magic spread over him like an instant heatwave, causing sweat to cover him in a moist film of fear.

"Where is the unicorn?" The voice was hard and dark, stripped of any nuance of feeling. Shaeton looked up into those eyes, saw the mage regarding him with a look of hatred. There was no hate specifically there for him, only for that which stood between the dark one and his prize.

Shaeton drew the pouch closer to his side. "I found this creature myself," he said slowly. "You have no claim to it."

"Nor you to your life if I do not get what is mine."

Perlanton raised a gloved hand and gestured. Immediately Shaeton felt a constriction in his throat, as though an unseen claw was raking the flesh from the inside. He staggered back, feeling the hard alley wall behind him.

"Well?" Perlanton said, amused at how simply the older man was swayed. "I leave it your choice."

Shaeton did not pause to think. If he performed any of his next actions incorrectly, he was surely dead. He made a gesture with his free hand, seeing the dark mage stripped of his flesh, a bare skeleton on the alley floor. He concentrated and sent a lash of fire sweeping down the alley toward the other.

Perlanton laughed as the tongue of fire enveloped him, and brought his hand down once. The magical blaze dwindled and disappeared, leaving the dark mage to stand and grin. He raised his hand again.

"Your choice, old man."

Shaeton wasn't listening. His mind was turning in on itself, seeking out the deepest level of power within him. He dove deep into the pool of his soul, gathering every available bit of strength. That strength, so long dormant, served him now this final time. He released it in full, pushing the last of the magic that dwelled inside his being. His eyes fell on the sack again, and his hands spasmed as the magic left him, seeping like a river of fire into the statue that lay within. He heard himself scream and fell into a sea of blackness with no end.

Something sharp brushed his cheek, and again the sweet smell of flowers filled his nose. Shaeton's body shook uncontrollably. He turned to his side, shuddering as the blood flowed once more through his veins. He was about to fall into sleep when he remembered he should be dead. He opened his eyes and looked around.

"That was very close," Phylas said, staring down at him. She touched him again with her horn, and he felt the strength flow back into him. "You were as close to death as you could come. I almost couldn't get you back."

"It was worth it," Shaeton said. He struggled to his feet, tired of being in close contact with the street. "As long as Perlanton believed. Is he gone?"

The unicorn nodded. "He left with the bag and the stone unicorn. He was very angry."

"At least he believed it was you. I compliment your magic."

Phylas bowed her head. "It was simple to spell stone into my likeness. It was you who risked everything."

Shaeton felt the silence in his mind and stared at the unicorn. He had never felt such a beast blush before. "The mage had to believe it was you."

"So you gave all your magic to the stone statue. Perlanton felt it when he picked it off your 'dead' body. There was no question in his mind it was me. He was very angry when he couldn't change me back into a real unicorn. He left swearing he would break my spell if it took all eternity."

"Just as long as he left," Shaeton stretched, feeling his old bones bend with amazing ability. He hadn't felt so good in years. Perhaps being without magic wouldn't be that bad.

Phylas snorted and came to stand beside the mage. Shaeton wished such green eyes existed in real females. "What if Perlanton had struck you with that spell?"

Shaeton came back to himself. "What was that?"

"Perlanton saw you die when you cast that spell at him. He assumed you gave too much of your magic in the attempt. If he had struck you with his full power, you really would be dead now."

Shaeton shrugged. "Then it's a good thing I did die when I did. Besides, I trusted you to be able to bring me back."

The unicorn snorted again and shook her head. "You mortals constantly amaze me."

Shaeton nodded, remembering for the first time that he was now, truly a mortal. The magic would never return to him. The remainder of his life would be spent as an ordinary man.

"That too, can have its benefits, if you have the right friends," Phylas said. She winked her eye at him, sending shivers running through him. Shaeton found himself wondering with embarrassment what she meant.

"Oh, you'd be surprised," she answered. "After all, you already know I can turn myself into stone. That isn't the only thing I can turn into, you know."

It was Shaeton's turn to smile as they walked back out of the alley and into the square. ❧

John P. Buentello is currently teaching at a court reporting school in San Antonio, Texas. He has a degree in English. He has been writing since his early teens, and along with his brother formed a lifelong infatuation with fantasy and science fiction. His writings have run the range from fantasy to horror to stories for children. John says, "Fantasy seems to be homeground for me though, and I doubt if I'll ever tire of the landscape."

Bob Eggleton, from Rhode Island, is a well-known fantasy/science fiction artist.

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The Girl

by Donald Backman

"How are you doing, Miss?" I asked. The girl looked like a ghost, pale skin faintly shining under the bright light of a full moon, long light brown hair swirling gently about her face. The thin white nightgown barely covering the slender young body stirred with the slight wind, whipped about her legs, lifted and fluttered – causing the fabric to shimmer – adding to the ghostliness. Stepping out of the concealing brush, I walked across the small clearing in front of the gaping maw of the cave that was the Dragon's Lair.

I stopped directly in front of her. The way the fools had chained her to the cross-shaped dragon post made her stand awkwardly, arms strung out and body hunched up. An impossible position for anyone. I sat down only a short distance away so we could talk easily, and made myself as comfortable as possible on the hard ground.

The girl watched me quietly, fear glinting faintly in her eyes, afraid of her fate, almost exhausted beyond caring. She stood there weakly, practically hanging from the cold iron chains fastened with rough iron bands to her slender wrists and feet. My heart went out to her.

Since she had failed to reply to my first question, I tried again to get a response. "So, you're to be dragon bait." That brought her around. I could see her mouth work a little, an angry retort only barely bitten back. I had judged right: she was beyond terror. Fear, all right, but no terror. She summoned up a little more strength, swaying a little less unsteadily on her bare feet. It was obvious that she had struggled long and hard before I'd arrived. Not only was the ground about the base of the post scuffed by her bloody feet, dark trails of dried blood along her bare arms and thin nightgown showed raw gashes where the brutes had savagely cut her while attaching the iron bands. I felt sorry for her, but there was nothing I could do to help.

"They must have been real men, to have taken a young lass like you out of her bed on a cold night like this and chained her up for a dragon."

She responded with anger at what had happened to her – anger at her own people. Fire flashed in her eyes, lips pressed together, jaw muscles tensed. A good sign. She blamed them, just as they deserved to be blamed. Face contorted with anger, she stood stiffly upright, momentarily throwing off the effects of blood loss, the cold night air, and sheer exhaustion. Then the chin lifted and she met my gaze.

"They took me in the middle of the night," she said in a voice both ragged and hoarse as if from too much screaming. "The men from the village came and took me." She shuddered at the memory. "They were drunk. Papa tried to stop them, but one of the men hit him over the head with a club. He's dead." Tears ran unchecked down her face. Despite her condition, she looked beautiful in the moonlight. "No one would help us. The men laughed when I screamed for help." I nodded sympathetically. "They even raped my mother!" She cried for a moment, unable to speak. Then, with great effort, control returned and the quaking calmed.

"They brought me up here and chained me to this." She rattled the chains in emphasis. "I tried to fight, but they tied me up and I couldn't do anything at all! One man even took my slippers! Said that I'd have no need for them. They all laughed."

"That's the way men such as that do it," I agreed. "They get their courage from some barrel or cask at the tavern. Then, they all gang up on some poor unfortunate young maiden and take her to the dragon – a dragon they're afraid to meet themselves. The cowards!" I said bitterly. I had no use for such as that.

She looked at me strangely, some hope glimmering in her eyes. "Are you going to let me go?"

"No, I can't. I don't have the key to those iron bands. Besides, the men at the village would just bring you back."

"Oh," she said, disappointed. I could see the hope had been a small one, really. Obviously, she hadn't really expected me to let her go. In a small, quiet voice, one which I had to strain to hear despite our nearness, she spoke again.

"What's going to happen to me?"

I looked at her for a moment, and silence hung thick in the air. Finally I broke the spell, but not to answer her question.

"I used to be a dragon slayer," I said.

She looked at me, a surprised look on her face.

"Don't jest."

"It's true."

"It can't be."

"But it is." I shifted about, trying to become a little more comfortable. The ground was getting awfully hard. "In my younger days I fought dragons for the king. I was a big man, strong and proud. I fought several small dragons, and killed them." She listened skeptically - but listened nevertheless. "The king paid me well. He even promised that I would marry his daughter."

"What happened?" she asked, still skeptical but intrigued too.

"A week before the wedding a new dragon appeared. A monstrously big one. I was the only on who could fight it. If it had come a week later, my marriage would have been done, and I wouldn't have had to go." I stopped for a moment, the memory still painful after all the years.

"I had never faced a real big dragon, and for the first time I was afraid. I rode out on my fine white horse and never returned."

"You're crazy," she said. "You couldn't have done any such thing!" Her denial was quick, and strong. There was renewed fire in her spirit. "No one fights dragons."

"Some do."

She stood without speaking. After a moment, I spoke again.

"Do you know what dragons do to virgins?" I asked her, returning to her earlier question.

She gazed at me, steadily. No waver at all. "Why, they eat us."

"Not true."

"You're trying to get my hopes up."

"It's still not true."

"Then, what do they do?" she snapped defiantly. "Toast us and leave us for the birds?" She rattled the chains loudly. Blood flowed anew from a gash on her arm. Pretty spunky for a young girl chained to a post. Especially for one who believed she would soon be dragon food. I liked that a lot.

"There's never anything left for anyone to find after someone's staked out here," she went on. "Everyone knows that when you feed a maiden to a dragon, it won't hunger for a year!"

"Dragons don't eat people," I said slowly.

"Then how do you explain the locked and empty chains if dragons don't eat people? How do you explain the fact that when a maiden is sacrificed, the dragon won't return for a year? It won't raid cows, or sheep, or goats! How do you explain that?!"

"After a virgin is, as you say, sacrificed," I spoke the word with distaste, "a dragon has an obligation and can't leave it."

"If dragons don't eat the maidens, then what do they do with them?" she snapped peevishly. I could see she didn't like being confused, and was beginning to anger. Good.

"Dragons usually turn virgins into dragons."

"With magic, I suppose?" she laughed derisively. "I've seen the so-called wizards and magicians at the market-place. They're fake!"

"Yes," I said patiently, "dragons use magic, but not the kind of magic that you know. That magic's fake, trickery, merely skilled hands. Dragons use the real magic, the kind that created the world."

"You're not making sense." She turned

Artwork by Lisa Hunt

her face away. "You're just teasing me. Go away and leave me be!"

"I can't."

"Then what's the meaning of all this foolish talk?" she demanded angrily.

"I just wanted to be friendly."

She stood, silent for a moment, then slowly looked into my eyes.

"So, what do dragons do?"

"They use the short fangs. You know, the ones wizards always wave around when they try to show how powerful they are. They bite you, and that makes you sleep. When you wake a year later, you are a dragon. It's as simple as that."

She laughed again.

"It's true," I insisted. Just to show her, and it was as good a time as any, I gripped her arm, bent down and gently nipped it, just deep enough to inject the potion. There was no reason to inflict unnecessary pain and injury.

She was shocked and stared at me with those beautiful eyes.

"Is it true?" she whispered.

"Yes."

The potion quickly took effect, and her eyes closed as she went to sleep. The frail young body sagged and hung limply from the chains. After a few minutes her breathing grew very shallow and faint – then stopped.

The potion attacked her bones, softening them, beginning the long transformation. After a short wait, the bones of her arms and hands softened enough to slip through the iron rings, and she fell to the ground.

Gathering her up in my arms, I carefully pulled her feet through the leg irons. When at last she was free, I took her deep into my lair, and there laid her down on a fine bed of scales. Gently, I covered her body with sheets of dragon's silk, plucked out of the air for just this purpose, carefully layering the sheer fabric over and over until an egg-shaped object lay on the floor beside me. Then, I laid down next to her. She had to be kept warm, or she would die. I shuffled about, curling my tail around the precious egg shape. Closing my eyes, I settled in for a year-long nap.

In a year, she would wake up, and then I'd have to find food for my ravenous new mate. A pleasant thought. We would pay a nice little visit on those monsters who did this to her. Dragons don't eat people, but that sure doesn't mean they don't kill them!

❧

Don Backman lives in Netarts, a small town on the Northern Oregon coast. He has an M.S. Degree in Special Education and works as a Special Education Teacher. During the summer months, he fights forest fires for the Oregon Department of Forestry. Don has written several short stories and a novel.

Lisa Hunt lives in New Hampshire and has exhibited her artwork at science fiction conventions on the east coast.

The Last Word

Our next issue is #13, and far from being unlucky, we think it will be one of our best issues ever. We have a Kelly Freas Studio cover for you! And it's for a medieval fantasy by Eluki bes Shahar (who also writes engaging romance novels as "Rosemary Edgehill"). We have artwork by Vincent DiFate, Janet Kramer, James Balkovek, Alan Giana, and Bob Eggleton. Authors featured in the next issue include Anthony R. Lewis, John Manor, Cynthia Hughes, Rocio Escobar-Blanco, John P. Buentello, G.E. Gaines, Morgan Noel, Thomas D. Sadler, Gloria Wall, Dawn Hardin, and Patricia Duffy Novak. If you never heard of some of these people – you will!

If you've looked over both the colophon and the table of contents, you might conclude that if you want to sell us a story, it helps to work here. Actually, it worked the other way 'round: when Leslie Ann Miller sent in her contract, she mentioned she had just lost her job and so the sale of her story cheered her up. She lived in Berkeley; we needed a typist; we hired her. (P.S. Marion turned down the next story she submitted.)

Yes, the first two are wyverns (flying dragons), not gryphons (eagle-headed, winged lions), with the Andre Norton interview. Best clip-art I could find.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* celebrated its third birthday with a party at BayCon in San Jose over Memorial Day Weekend. There have been some changes since last year: as most of you know by now, Jan Burke has resigned as Managing Editor and I have replaced her. The whole office moved from Jan's to Marion's, and we have two computers: a PC and a Mac. We have made some printing changes, too. This issue, we are trying out a somewhat lighter paper that is still very opaque, hoping to offset the killer postal increase Uncle Sam dealt us this spring. We have also switched printers, to Superior Press in San Leandro, because they are (a) closer to us and (b) they use sheet-fed presses which will give even better-quality reproduction of artwork and stories.

While I worked at LOCUS, I began urging Charles to print the artist's names next to the covers we reproduced for reviews, etc. It took months, but eventually he agreed with me, and LOCUS's phone calls to publishers requesting the names of any uncredited artists produced an interesting change in some publishers. When we started making these phone calls, some did not keep track of which artist did what cover. Now the majority of sf and fantasy books include credit for the artist.

But I had never commissioned artwork for specific stories until I worked here. So I contacted David Cherry, hoping that as past president of ASFA he would be able to steer me in the right direction regarding contractual arrangements with artists, etc. David went far beyond the call of duty and sent me two long letters, enclosing a sample "Confirmation of Engagement" form, urging me to do my utmost to insure that the artist's work was not short-changed in the process of taking a color painting and turning it into a printed magazine cover. And he described in great detail *how* I could accomplish this. I thought I was familiar with the process: you get the artwork, you have separations made, and the printer does the cover. Right? Well, partly. So I am extremely grateful to David Cherry for his generous advice. Janet Kramer has also been an excellent, patient resource, steering me in particular towards the work of NorthWest artists she likes. (She's a former Seattle-ite.)

The art was all commissioned during one hectic weekend of phone calls. I described the stories, said I'd send them out the next day, and could the artists have their work back to me within two weeks? Some of the people I called had to say no, but an amazing number said yes (as you can gather, since all the stories *are* illustrated). Then I sat down and worried: what would I do if one of these very nice, obliging people sent in something I hated? I'm extremely picky about what I like at convention art shows. Presumably some of them have other things that *don't* get displayed. What if an artist submitted a piece I thought was awful? Well, I was knocked out by the artwork that came in. My artists were CHAMPS! All of them! Everything got to me by my deadline, and I think you'll agree that all the artwork in this issue is topnotch (and so is what we have prepared for the next issue). So my worries were in vain. Thanks, people!

– *Rachel E. Holmen*

The Cauldron -- Issue #12

- ❑ The Connecticut Eskimo – Madeleine L'Engle
- ❑ They Never Approve – Selina Rosen
- ❑ Candles and Fireworks – Helena "Jo" Karr
- ❑ Yorkshire Luck – Bob Liddil
- ❑ Slag – Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck
- ❑ The Wizard's Brew – Greg Hoover
- ❑ Suggestion – Barbara Rosen
- ❑ Back to Basics – Dorothy J. Heydt
- ❑ Sunrise – Leslie Ann Miller
- ❑ Name-Price – Catherine Faber
- ❑ The Dance – Stephen Crane Davidson
- ❑ The Stone Unicorn – John P. Buentello
- ❑ The Girl – Donald Backman

Rima Saret has requested that her story, "The Ever-Sounding Harp", not be included in the Cauldron voting.

Vote for your favorites, then send the ballot to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701.

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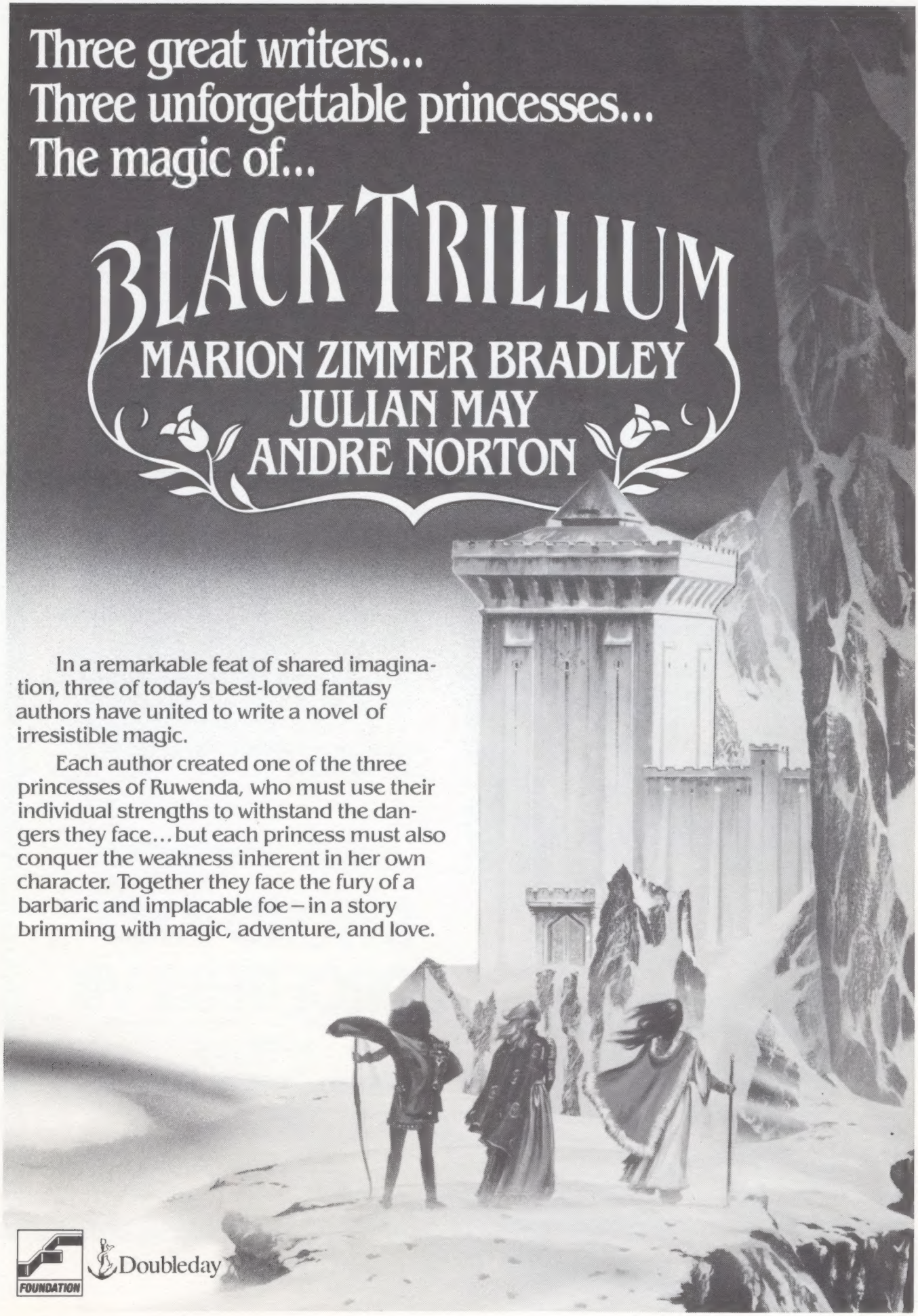
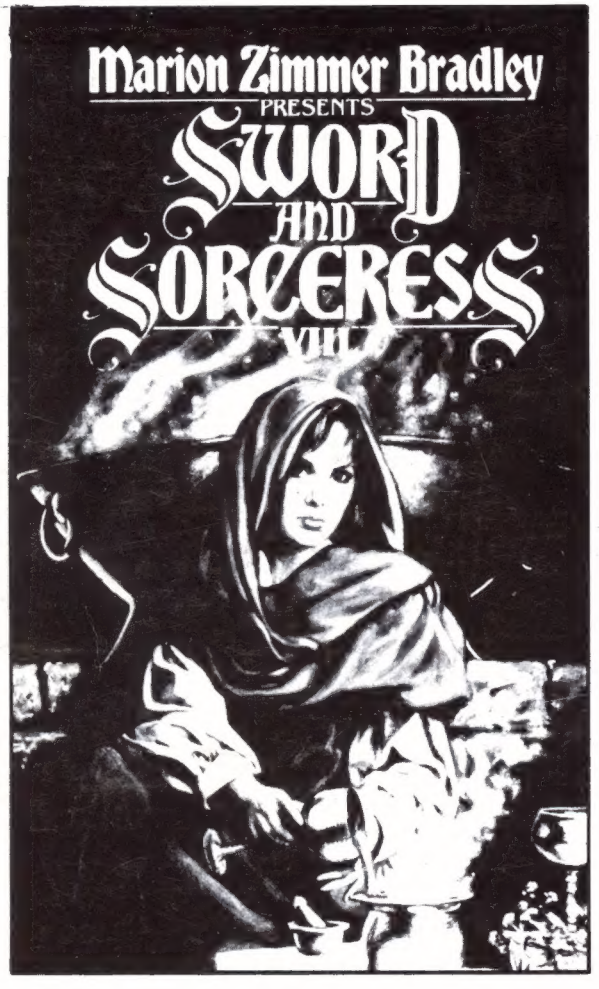


FOUNDATION

Doubleday

Spells cast and swords crossed—the battle against evil goes on!



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